

CHURCH
AND PEOPLE
IN BRITAIN

Religious Romance

&

Historical Reality

ARCHIBALD
ROBERTSON

“The English Church is older than the English State. To the Church we owe Magna Charta, the abolition of serfdom and slavery, the initiative in popular education, and, in short, the basis of our English Liberties.”

These statements have been the commonplaces of Church Defence propaganda for a hundred years. What are the facts? Mr. Robertson takes us to the original sources—medieval chronicles and later contemporary documents—and subjects the claims of the Churches, Roman, Anglican, and other, to a ruthless analysis in the dry light of history.

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ANGLICAN SHIPWRECK

CHURCH AND PEOPLE IN BRITAIN

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CHAPTER I

THE EARLY BRITISH CHURCH

THE distinction between Church and State, or more generally between sacred and secular, was unknown in the ancient world. Priesthood and kingship both took their rise from the primitive medicine-man or magician, and were only slowly differentiated the one from the other. All early kings were priests, and were responsible to their people for the right functioning of those forces of nature which early man had not the means of understanding or controlling.

The British Isles were no exception to the rule. "It was the belief of the ancient Irish," says Frazer, "that when their kings observed the customs of their ancestors, the seasons were mild, the crops plentiful, the cattle fruitful, the waters abounded with fish, and the fruit trees had to be propped up on account of the weight of their produce."¹ The magical functions of kingship lived on down to the eighteenth century in the practice of touching for the "king's evil" (scrofula), which the kings of England and France shared with the savage chiefs of Tonga. If you had asked a savage by what right a chief regulated the religious rites and beliefs of his subjects, he would have asked in surprise what else you supposed a chief was for.

Even after the functions of the priest as sacrificer and soothsayer have been differentiated from those of the king as war leader, both are essentially public functionaries. The Druids, who in early times exercised priestly functions in Gaul and the British Isles,

¹ *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, pp. 89-90.

were a formidable hierarchy. They were exempt from military service, acted as judges in public and private disputes, claimed to pierce the secrets of nature and the mysteries of life and death, punished disobedience with excommunication, and placated the gods with cruel rites of human sacrifice. After the Roman conquest of Gaul and Britain, Druidism was suppressed, less for its inhumanity than as a political danger. But it survived in northern Britain and in Ireland, to which Roman rule never penetrated; and even in the south the tradition was not wholly forgotten. When, therefore, Christianity found its way to these islands, the Catholic clergy took over functions which already had a long local history behind them.

We do not know the date when Christianity first reached Britain. A medieval legend alleged that Joseph of Arimathea had come to Britain after the Crucifixion, had built the first Christian church on the isle of Avalon, and had planted there his staff, which became a thorn flowering twice a year, the church subsequently forming the nucleus of the abbey of Glastonbury. This legend is first heard of in the twelfth century, and was obviously invented by the monks of Glastonbury to glorify their foundation. It is still retailed as authentic in local guide-books. The custom of lying to the glory of God dies hard, especially when there is money in it! There is in fact no evidence that there were any Christians in Britain before the fourth century. Even ecclesiastical tradition alleges no British martyrdom prior to that of Alban, said to have been beheaded at Verulam in 303; and as Alban is not mentioned until the sixth century, he probably never existed. It is not until after Constantine had publicly espoused the cause of the new religion that we find indubitable evidence of Christianity in Britain. In 314, two years after he had declared himself, the Church in Britain was

sufficiently numerous to send three bishops to the synod of Arles, summoned by the Emperor to adjudicate on the case of the Donatists—those awkward people in Africa who refused to recognize the alliance between Church and Empire. As in those early days every local church had its bishop, the number of British Christians under Constantine was probably not greater than could be accounted for by a desire to follow the new imperial fashion.

Christianity, though officially protected and patronized, was not enforced by the secular arm until after 380, by which time the Roman Empire in these parts was nearing its end. While officially Britain became Christian, the mass of British provincials probably accepted the change with indifference. Centuries later their Welsh descendants continued to venerate the mistletoe, to avert sorcery from the land by May or midsummer bonfires, and to keep for good luck the last tuft of corn cut from the harvest—pagan rites which their ancestors had practised and in which they themselves still covertly believed.

Two individuals only of the early British Church made a name in history. One of these, Pelagius, incurred the reproach of heresy by a rash attempt to infuse a little common sense into theology. One of the cardinal dogmas of historic Christianity is that of the Fall of Man. According to this, the disobedience of our first parents infected the whole human race with a congenital inability to do right and a consequent liability to God's wrath, from which we can be saved only by the intervention of God himself. It follows that, while the evil in the world is attributable wholly to man's sin, the good is attributable wholly to the grace of God, of which the Church is the licensed retailer. Pelagius had the temerity to argue that if man was capable of evil, he was also capable of good. Anticipating Immanuel Kant by fourteen centuries, he coined the motto, "If I ought, I can." This

impious self-reliance drew down upon him the hostility of Augustine. By the exertions of that great saint Pelagius was condemned to banishment and confiscation of goods, and the dogma of the total depravity of mankind preserved for the encouragement of posterity.

The other notable British Churchman of those days, Patricius, or Patrick, is famous as the apostle of Ireland. His achievements have been much exaggerated. His extant writings suggest that he was almost illiterate; and the Christianity which he professed was but a higher form of magic. The famous hymn, the *Breastplate of St. Patrick*, which critics incline to think genuine, is a barbaric chant invoking the Trinity and the powers of nature to defend the saint against women and wizards. The semi-pagan character of Patrick's religion may have helped to commend it to the tribal chiefs of fifth-century Ireland, who no doubt regarded him as a new and original kind of Druid. It is certain that he tolerated a good many pagan superstitions and practices, and that the mass of the Irish were not effectively Christianized for many centuries after the death of their patron saint.

In the lifetime of Pelagius and Patrick, civilization in Britain collapsed swiftly and catastrophically. After the withdrawal of the Roman legions, in 407, almost total darkness descends on the scene. The Anglo-Saxon pirates who during the fifth and sixth centuries possessed themselves of southern and eastern Britain worshipped their own Teutonic nature-deities. Wherever they penetrated, Christianity for the time being disappeared. There is no reason to believe that the Britons in those districts were exterminated. The sixth-century British writer, Gildas, tells of destroyed and deserted towns and widespread slaughter and ruin, but speaks also of Britons who purchased their lives at the price of slavery. We find in later Anglo-Saxon laws mention of numerous "Welshmen," descendants of the conquered race, who rank

below Englishmen of a corresponding class. The faith of these conquered Britons does not seem to have survived the manifest triumph of Woden and Thor, nor to have revived until the conversion of England to Christianity.

Among the still independent Britons of Wales, Cumberland, Cornwall, and Strathclyde, and among Patrick's Irish converts, Christianity of a sort survived. But the English invasion of the south and east had so completely cut off the Celts, both Welsh and Irish, from communication with the continent that, when contact was restored, exasperating differences, as we shall see, appeared between the Celtic churches and the rest of Christendom.

CHAPTER II

THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND

IN the course of the fifth century the Roman Empire in the West ceased to exist. Its fall had the effect of greatly enhancing the power and position of the Roman Church. Through the donations of the faithful that Church had become possessed of rich lands in Italy and the adjacent provinces; and after the virtual extinction of imperial authority the Pope was the one Roman dignitary in the West still able to command respect from the German conquerors.

Of these conquerors the most powerful survivor in the sixth century was the far-flung kingdom founded by Clovis the Frank, the first German monarch to be baptized into the Catholic Church. Having thereby enlisted the support of the Church against his rivals, who had the misfortune to be Arian heretics, Clovis extended his realm at their expense from the North Sea to the Pyrenees. After his death the Frankish dominions suffered frequent and violent partition among his sons and grandsons. One of the latter, Charibert, who reigned for a few years at Paris, gave his daughter, Bertha, in marriage to Ethelbert, King of Kent, who in time was able to impose his suzerainty on all the Anglo-Saxon princes south of the Humber. This marriage brought Britain, for the first time since the departure of the Roman legions, into regular contact with the continent of Europe. Ethelbert must have been constantly impressed by the enormous advantages which his wife's family had derived from their timely adhesion to the Catholic faith. It was doubtless suggested to him that if he were to follow their example, he and his dynasty might become as

supreme in Britain as the house of Clovis in Gaul. The new times demanded a new religion. Woden and Thor might be good enough for savages in the German forests. Catholic Christianity, which inculcated non-resistance to kings and threatened rebels with pains and penalties that did not end with death, was a fitter ally for a strong feudal monarchy such as Ethelbert was trying to build up.

When, therefore, Gregory the Great, as spiritual chief of Western Christendom, decided to send a mission to England, Ethelbert was inclined to welcome it. In 597 Augustine and his monks landed in Thanet.¹ We learn from Bede how Ethelbert required them to meet him in the open air in case they should put some spell on him if invited indoors (the priest was still a medicine-man in popular estimation!); how, after his misgivings were overcome, he allowed them to settle and preach at Canterbury, his capital; and how Canterbury became an archiepiscopal see. We learn, too, something of the way in which the faith was propagated. Gregory charges Augustine to disturb existing customs as little as possible :—

“ The idol temples of that nation are in no wise to be destroyed; but let the idols in them be destroyed. Let water be blessed and sprinkled in those temples, let altars be built, and let relics be set there. For, if those temples are well built, it is needful that they should be turned from the worship of demons to the service of the true God, that when that nation sees that its temples are not destroyed, it may put away error from its heart, and knowing and worshipping the true God, gather together familiarly in the places to which it is used. And seeing that they are wont to slay many oxen in sacrifice to demons, for this also let

¹ This is, of course, a different Augustine from the Father of the Church mentioned in Chapter I.

some solemn festival be substituted. On the day of dedication, or on the birthday of the holy martyrs whose relics are set there, let them make for themselves booths of the boughs of trees around those churches which were temples aforetime, and let them celebrate a festival with a religious banquet. Let them not now sacrifice animals to the devil, but let them slay animals to the glory of God for their eating, and let them return thanks, when they are filled, to the giver of all. So, some joy of the outer man being left to them, they will be better attuned to the joy within."¹

In England, as elsewhere, Catholicism was in fact a baptized paganism. A considerable body of pagan practices, such as dancing round the maypole, crowning the harvest queen, and burning the Yule log, lived on with the sanction or connivance of the Church to scandalize the Puritans of a thousand years later.

Even so, the Christianization of the English was not accomplished without many setbacks. The reign of Ethelbert saw the conversion of Kent and Essex; but his dominion fell to pieces after his death, and the Church came near to losing its foothold even in Kent. After that, political supremacy passed for a time to the kingdom of Northumbria. Its king, Edwin, had much the same reasons for adopting Christianity as Clovis in Gaul or Ethelbert in Kent. He is said to have vowed to become a Christian if successful in a campaign, and when he won it, to have been baptized with his nobles and people at York (627). Six years later he was defeated and killed by Penda of Mercia and Caedwalla of Wales, and Northumbria lapsed into paganism. The alliance of Penda and Caedwalla shows that the Welsh, though Christians, were willing

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, xxx.

to join forces with pagans against a Christian king who had encroached on their territory.

Penda, the only English ruler to put up a real fight for the old gods, is an interesting figure of whom we should like to know more. Bede says that he tolerated Christianity, but hated and despised Christians whose practice he saw to be at variance with their precepts. His tolerance is in strong contrast to the intolerance of his Christian contemporaries, who were now beginning to suppress paganism and to enforce Christianity in their dominions under pains and penalties.

Penda fell in battle against Oswy of Northumbria in 655, after which year the cause of paganism collapsed. The last stronghold of the old gods in England was the Isle of Wight. Its suppression there, in 686, was attended by circumstances of peculiar atrocity. In view of the popular belief that England was converted to Christianity exclusively by peaceful persuasion, Bede's story is worth repeating :—

“After Ceadwalla¹ gained the kingdom of Wessex, he took also the Isle of Wight, which until then had been wholly given to idolatry. He proceeded to destroy all the inhabitants by wholesale massacre, and to plant men of his dominion in their stead, vowing (though they say he was not yet baptized in Christ) that if he took the island, he would give the fourth part of it and of the spoil to the Lord. Which vow he paid, and offered the fourth part to bishop Wilfrid, who chanced then to be present on a visit from his own country, to be put to the Lord's use. . . .

“Herein I deem it should not be passed over in silence that two royal youths, to wit brothers of Arwald, king of the island, were crowned with God's special favour and became the first-

¹ Not to be confounded with Caedwalla of Wales mentioned above.

fruits of them in that island that were saved by believing. For when the enemy beset the island, they escaped from the island by flight and crossed over to the neighbouring country of the Jutes. There they came to the place which is called the Milestone, and believed that they should be hidden from the face of the conquering king; but they were betrayed and commanded to be slain. When a certain abbot and priest, Cynibert by name, whose monastery was not far from thence, at a place which is called Hreutford, heard of it . . . he came to the king . . . and besought him that if it must needs be that the boys should be slain, they might first partake of the sacraments of the Christian faith. The king granted it; and the abbot himself instructed them in the word of truth, washed them in the font of the Saviour, and made them sure of entering into the everlasting kingdom. And presently, when the executioner had come, they joyfully suffered the temporal death through which they did not doubt that they would pass to the eternal life of the soul.”¹

It is worth noting that the saintly bishop Wilfrid does not appear to have raised any objection to the proceedings. The ruffianly Ceadwalla afterwards abdicated his kingdom and was baptized at Rome, where he died in an odour of remarkable sanctity.

The Christianization of England produced no important change in the morals of the people, and less change in their beliefs than might be supposed. There is no evidence that the English, after their conversion, were more kindly, more chaste, more sober, or more peaceful than they had been before. As to belief, the acceptance of Christianity here and elsewhere did not mean the dismissal of the old gods as figments of the

¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, xvi.

imagination. It meant their degradation to the rank of demons. It meant that Woden and Thor, instead of gods to be worshipped, were devils to be renounced; that Christ, the Virgin, and St. Peter were stronger than they; and that dealings with the old gods were punishable by death and by hell-fire after death. Broken traditions of the proscribed worship persisted all through the Middle Ages and later in the form of witchcraft.

The most important result of the establishment of Christianity was to introduce into the English social system a new and immensely powerful feudal class in the shape of the Catholic clergy and monks. The very first years of Augustine's mission saw the foundation of the sees of Canterbury, Rochester, and London, and their endowment with lands and possessions by King Ethelbert. In every Christianized kingdom one or more episcopal sees were similarly endowed: York in Northumbria; Dunwich in East Anglia; Dorchester-on-Thames, and later Winchester and Sherborne, in Wessex; Lichfield in Mercia; Selsey in Sussex. While the first bishops, no doubt, were zealous and laborious missionaries, their successors in most cases differed little or not at all from secular lords of the soil. Bede, writing about 734, observes that many villages have never seen a bishop for years on end, but have nevertheless to contribute to the episcopal revenues. These bishops, he complains, "preach not the gospel nor lay their hands on the faithful for nothing. They take money from them that hear them, which the Lord hath forbidden, and they scorn to carry on the work of the word, which the Lord hath commanded."¹

Monks soon came to occupy a similar position of parasitic privilege. Monasticism had originated in the last troubled centuries of the Roman Empire, when many Christians fled from the temptations and dangers

¹ Bede, *Epistle to Egbert*, 7.

of the world to seek salvation in solitude and austerity. As their numbers increased, monks became organized in self-supporting communities, and the extreme asceticism of the early anchorites was considerably relaxed. In every country into which Christianity was introduced, monasteries and nunneries were founded in great numbers, endowed with large grants of land, and freed from all secular jurisdiction. In these wealthy foundations the burden of manual labour was inevitably shifted on to the peasants, who cultivated the abbey lands, leaving the holy men free to combine devotion with ease. Those who were unfitted for or averse to a secular career in those unsettled times had every inducement and opportunity to take refuge in monastic vows; and it is no wonder that we find Bede, about 734, deploring the existence of countless monasteries whose inmates, while enjoying the privileges of monks, were very far from observing the rule of St. Benedict. Alcuin, in 797, tells the same story. "Throughout the churches of Christ teachers of the truth have perished; well-nigh all follow the vanities of the world and hold in hatred the discipline of their rule."¹

These abuses had their compensations. The monks and clergy could at least read and write. Before their coming the English were practically unlettered; the Runic alphabet employed among Germanic peoples in pre-Christian times was known to very few and put to very little use. With Christianity came the Latin language, the Latin alphabet, and the writing of books. Such contemporary histories as we possess of the early Middle Ages, meagre, partial, and credulous as they are, were written by clerics. The laity, from king to peasant, remained, generally speaking, illiterate.

While England was being evangelized from Rome, the Celts of Wales and Ireland, as we saw in the last chapter, practised an unorthodox Christianity of their

¹ Alcuin, Epistle LXXIV.

own. Late in the sixth century, Columba and other Irish monks had converted to their special brand of Christianity the barbaric tribes who then populated what later became the kingdom of Scotland. In the following century Irish monks from Iona converted Northumbria; and for a short time it was in doubt whether northern England would follow the Irish or the Roman Church. The ostensible differences between the two related to such matters as the time of celebrating Easter and the form of the tonsure, and seem now sufficiently petty.¹ The real point was that the Celts would not admit the authority of the Pope to settle such matters. At the synod of Whitby, in 664, King Oswy decided to stand in with the Pope rather than with the monks of Iona. Even in the Celtic fringe, contact with continental Christendom soon wore down such local peculiarities.

Thenceforth, until the Reformation, the allegiance of the English Church to the See of Rome was never in question. Feudal monarchy and the Roman hierarchy had need each of the other. Rome needed the support of the secular arm in enforcing her doctrines and collecting her revenues; and kings needed the support of Rome in establishing and extending their power.

¹ The Celtic clergy followed the Druids (of whom they were the real successors) in shaving the front of the head instead of the crown.

CHAPTER III

THE NORMAN CONQUEST

THE Danish invasions of the ninth century led to a revival of paganism in parts of Britain. We find Pope Formosus (891-896) rebuking the English bishops in stinging terms as "dogs that cannot bark," and urging them, on pain of excommunication, to greater efforts in combating the old religion.¹ The issue was decided not by missionary enterprise, but by the valour of Alfred and his successors. Under Athelstan (925-940) England became for the first time in its history a united kingdom, with at least a nominal suzerainty over Wales and Scotland. We read in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that in 926 Athelstan received the homage of Welsh, Cornish, Scottish, and Northumbrian vassal rulers, and that "with covenants and oaths they ratified their agreement . . . and renounced all idolatry, and afterwards returned in peace." As these princes were at least nominal Christians, their renunciation of idolatry can only mean that they undertook to suppress it in their respective dominions.

Ecclesiastical fervour, however, was at a low ebb. There is no reason to think that the standard of clerical discipline was materially different in the tenth century from what we have seen it to have been in the time of Bede and Alcuin. Bishops drew the revenues of their dioceses as secular lords drew those of their fiefs. Parish priests, not yet sworn to celibacy, enjoyed their tithes and other privileges at the price of a little gabbled Latin. Abbeys afforded shelter and support to many who practised neither poverty, chastity, nor obedience.

¹ *Cartularium Saxonicum*.

This state of things by no means suited the Papacy. The Popes, indeed, had long ceased to be examples of apostolic poverty or sanctity. Their revenues had made the Holy See the richest and most corrupt corporation in Western Europe. It was said that money could do anything at Rome. But Rome could not hope long to enjoy the advantages of corruption if the general body of the Church were as corrupt as she. Rome's revenues would seriously diminish if too much stuck to the fingers of the greedy priests (many of them with families to keep) who collected them. Moreover, unless bishops and clergy applied themselves energetically to their duties, and monks were something more than cowed impostors, they would lose credit with the laity. Accordingly from the middle of the tenth century there was a movement to tighten up ecclesiastical organization, to impose celibacy on the clergy, to enforce monastic rules, to exalt the religious at the expense of the secular life, and to enhance the power of the Church generally. For this purpose the Church needed, as always, the support of the secular arm, and had little difficulty in getting it. The descendants of Alfred, like all families which have reigned for a long time, began to show signs of effeteness. They tended to die early and to leave youthful successors. The deciding voice, therefore, in public affairs rested with the great lords; and among them only the Church had a consistent and predetermined policy.

To rivet the papal yoke more firmly on England was one object of the Norman Conquest. The Conquest really began when Edward the Confessor, more Norman than English and more monk than king, came over with his French-speaking friends and filled English bishoprics and earldoms with Norman nominees. The Norman brand of bishop and baron was sufficiently different from the native sort for the substitution to cause an immediate strain. A national revolt,

in which the citizens of towns like London and Dover first made their mark in history, forced the Norman bishops and earls to fly for their lives. This was a challenge not only to Normandy, but to Rome. The Normans at this time were everywhere the hired bullies of the Papacy. The English leaders, on the other hand, were tainted with anti-clericalism. Godwin and his sons in particular—the national heroes of the hour—had a bad name as appropriators of abbey lands. Any enterprise, therefore, directed to the restoration of Norman authority in England was sure of the support of Rome. When William the Bastard and his army of Normans, Bretons, Frenchmen, Flemings, and other pious filibusters, fortified with the papal blessing, descended on England and shared out English land (always excepting Church land), they were not only serving their own interests, but enabling the Pope to reduce England to canonical obedience and to maintain and increase the hold of the Church on the wealth of the country.

The increase in the wealth, power, and prestige of the Church was immediate. The Anglo-Saxon chronicler, who as a patriot records William's "covetousness in gold and silver" and the "miserable swinking of the poor" under his rule, nevertheless, as a monk, commends his "mildness to the good men that loved God" and his endowment of monasteries all over England. Churches were built of a size and an architectural grandeur previously unknown in this country. Ecclesiastical causes were transferred from the jurisdiction of lay courts to that of the bishops. At the same time William took care that the increase in the power of the Church should not weaken, but enhance his own. Bishoprics and abacies, as they fell vacant, were filled by Norman and other foreign nominees, among whom Lanfranc, the Lombard Archbishop of Canterbury, stands out. Not a single English cleric obtained preferment. Nor had

William any intention of playing second fiddle to Rome in the government of England or of countenancing the claim to make and unmake kings, which the vaulting ambition of Gregory VII was beginning to advance. William knew very well how the oracle was worked at Rome : he had once worked it himself. To preclude the danger of papal authority being used against him, he forbade the recognition of any new Pope in England until recognized by himself, or the promulgation of papal letters in England until he had seen them. After the Domesday survey, which completed his work, every landholder in England, churchman or layman, was made to do homage to him in person. "They all bowed themselves before him and became his men, and swore him oaths of allegiance that they would against all other men be faithful to him."¹ The Church was to enjoy her revenues and her spiritual power : William and his sons were to be temporal masters in their own house so far as it lay with him to make them so.

So far as edicts and oaths could make a throne secure, that of William and his successors was secure indeed. But oaths could be broken and edicts could be set at naught. The permanence of William's structure depended on the ability of the king to play off the Church against the baronage, the lesser barons against the greater, and so forth. The time was not yet come when any monarch could prevail against Church and baronage together, as more than one king was to learn to his cost. The matter was nearly put to the test in the short reign of William Rufus, who made an enemy of the Church by his cool appropriation of ecclesiastical revenues and his open indifference to religion. On one occasion, if we are to believe William of Malmesbury, Rufus amused himself by staging a debate between the bishops and the London Jews, merrily vowing that he would turn Jew if the

¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, year 1086.

rabbis had the better of the argument. Apart from his attitude to the Church, he seems to have been neither better nor worse than other Norman rulers. The wretched people were taxed to the bone, as they had been under the Conqueror. But a king who defied the Church was beyond forgiveness; and monkish chroniclers saw to it that Rufus paid the uttermost farthing in reputation. Henry I made peace with the Church, and is therefore given a good character by the monkish historians of the time; but so far as the lot of the people was concerned, his reign did not differ from those of his father and brother.

Mention has been made of the Jews. They appear to have settled in England for the first time under the Conqueror. Only their financial utility to the rulers of Christian Europe saved this alien and outcast people in the Middle Ages from the extermination meted out to other religious dissenters. Debarred from owning land or engaging in productive occupations, they resorted to finance as the only means of livelihood open to them, and were allowed to do so on condition that they held their gains at the disposal of the sovereign. In the eyes of the law they were mere chattels of the king. All that they owned was his; debts due to them were in effect due to him; and they were even forbidden to compound with a defaulting debtor without his permission. Actually, therefore, the toleration of the Jews was a device by which the king, without formally violating the canons of the Church against usury, could practise it at second hand on a remunerative scale and shift the odium on to his agents. The wretched Jews were triply detested. To the clergy they were misbelievers protected by the king from the vengeance which was their due. To the lay landowners, who were their chief customers, they were indecently exorbitant creditors. To the ignorant they were monsters who had killed Christ,

and who were reputed to crucify Christian children and to use their blood for ritual purposes. The king was their only protector; and his protection was not always effective.

It is sometimes said that the Church afforded a door through which the serf of feudal times could escape from his abject condition. This is only a half-truth. The door existed, but it was jealously guarded. A serf taking holy orders naturally became free. But no serf could be ordained or become a monk without his lord's permission; and that had to be paid for. A riskier but cheaper way to freedom was to run away to one of the towns, which from the twelfth century onward began to achieve partial or total independence of feudal control. If a serf lived in a chartered town for a year and a day unclaimed by his lord, and was admitted to a guild, he became free, and his lord thenceforth had no power over him. But the rise of towns was not favoured by the Church. "Where there is a corporate town," writes the chronicler Richard of Devizes, quoting a common saying, "the people are fat, the king fearful, the priests faint."¹ And it must be remembered that at this time the whole urban population was a tiny fraction of the nation. The greater part of the country was agricultural, and the greater part of the people serfs bound to the soil.

¹ *Communio est tumor plebis, timor regni, tepor sacerdotii.* Stubbs, *Select Charters*, eighth edition, p. 252.

CHAPTER IV

CATHOLIC HEYDAY

THE twelfth and thirteenth centuries are generally agreed to have been the high-water mark of the power of the Catholic Church in Europe. It was the age of the Crusades. Stimulated by papal promises of a plenary indulgence and by the chance of carving a principality or a duchy out of Asia, warlike adventurers from every Western country rode forth to massacre the infidel and rescue the Holy Land, while Genoese and Venetian merchants seized the opportunity to open up a lucrative trade with the East.

The part played by England in the Crusades was relatively small, and the share of Englishmen in the pickings of Asia nil. The English, under the Normans, were a conquered race. Their language had ceased to be spoken in polite society; and their part in the adventures of the time was to foot the bill for their French-speaking lords and masters. Meanwhile the Church did not forget that the Norman Conquest had been effected in her interest and that she should in justice reap the benefit. The episcopal courts gradually extended their power. In the anarchy of Stephen's reign it became the rule that no cleric could be tried for any offence, however heinous, except by an ecclesiastical court, with the possibility of appeal to Rome.

The complete failure of Henry II to dislodge the Church from this position of privilege illustrates the overwhelming power wielded by the hierarchy in the twelfth century. He had what we should now consider an unanswerable case. But Thomas Becket, whom he made Archbishop of Canterbury with the

express object of bringing the clergy to reason, played him false. Becket lived only to magnify his office, whatever that office was. He obstructed the King at every turn, appealed to the Pope against him, and hurled excommunications freely at his supporters. Then four of Henry's knights did the King the disservice of murdering Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. The King's work lay in ruins. There was a danger that the Pope would excommunicate him and proclaim a crusade against him. The medieval Papacy could usually, in the last resort, crush a recalcitrant ruler by inviting his pious and rapacious neighbours to help themselves to his land. To avoid this fate Henry abandoned the struggle and did a humiliating penance. The sole result of his attack on clerical privilege was to provide the good folk of Canterbury with a new source of income in the throngs of pilgrims who visited the shrine of the "holy, blissful martyr." It is the fashion with some big-hearted, but muddle-headed, Christian Socialists to glorify Becket as in some way a forerunner of their movement. What this turbulent priest had in common with modern Socialism it passes my wit to conceive. If he defied the king, it was for the privileges of his order. He was no more a martyr for the people than Guy Fawkes.

How little Henry was prepared for a breach with the Church was shown by the readiness with which, even in the middle of his quarrel with Becket, he helped in the suppression of heresy. Hitherto heresy had been unknown in England. But in 1166 some thirty Cathari, or Paulicians, as they were termed, from Germany were arrested and brought before a synod of bishops at Oxford. They are described by the chroniclers as uneducated peasants, but as impervious to arguments or threats. For rejecting the Catholic Church and the sacraments as an imposture, and for holding that man could work out his own salvation by asceticism, they were handed over to the secular

arm, branded on the forehead, stripped to the waist, and flogged out of the town. Orders were given that no one in England should shelter or succour them on pain of death; and they perished in the cold of winter. They would no doubt have been burnt alive if their numbers had been such as to cause alarm to the authorities.

Henry rendered a further service to the Church by bringing Ireland for the first time in its history into subjection to the Papacy. Though Christianized after a fashion in the fifth century, the Irish tribes, as late as the twelfth, were still semi-pagan. According to a monkish chronicler of the time their marriages were frequently polygamous, and from a Christian standpoint incestuous, and they paid neither tithes nor Peter's pence.¹ This is no doubt prejudiced evidence; but the marital customs of the Irish were certainly barbaric, and their omission to contribute to the papal revenue aggravated the offence. Henry offered his assistance to the Pope; and the Pope in return granted Ireland to him and his heirs for ever. With the help of Strongbow and other land-hungry barons the Irish chiefs were induced within a few years to do real or nominal homage to Henry, and the Irish clergy and laity to accept Catholic discipline. The whole transaction has a family resemblance to the Norman conquest of England a century before, and may be reckoned as the last of the many signal services rendered to the Papacy by the Norman mailed fist.

The object of papal policy throughout the Middle Ages was to aggrandize and enrich the Holy See at the expense of every country in Christendom. As to the reforms which Rome, in her own interest, from time to time imposed on the Church, their efficacy may be judged from an anecdote recorded of Richard Cœur de Lion. Being reproved by a cleric for pride, covetousness, and lechery, he answered: "I give my

¹ *Gesta Henrici Secundi.*

pride to the proud Templars, my covetousness to the Cistercian monks, and my lechery to the prelates of the Church.”¹ In the opening years of the thirteenth century Innocent III, the ablest Pope who ever reigned in Rome, prosecuted the policy of aggression with a success never equalled before or since. In England he was able to achieve that control over the country’s temporal affairs which the kings of this country, from the Conqueror to Henry II, had schemed and laboured to prevent. The incompetent John played straight into his hands. John had already lost Normandy to France, and held his diminished kingdom with the help of foreign mercenaries against a baronage which hated him for his exactions and despised him for his ill-success. Having quarrelled with the Church for a trumperry reason (a dispute over the election of a new Archbishop of Canterbury), he affronted the Pope by confiscating ecclesiastical property, only to collapse when Innocent excommunicated him and commissioned Philip of France to invade and take possession of England. John thereupon not only withdrew all his measures against the clergy, but surrendered his crown to the papal legate and agreed that he and his heirs should hold England and Ireland as vassals of the Holy See subject to an annual tribute. England had become part of the Patrimony of Peter. It was one of the proudest moments in the history of the Papacy.

John having come to grief again in an attempt to recover his French possessions, the barons, in 1215, took occasion to settle old scores. Inspired by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and calling themselves “the army of God and Holy Church,” they marched on London, occupied it without opposition, and forced John to set his seal to the Great Charter. On the strength of this achievement and of the use made of the Charter by the lawyers of a later age, Langton, and through him the Catholic

¹ Roger of Hoveden, *Chronicles*.

Church, are often held up to admiration as the authors of English freedom. But the idea that the document extorted from John could be interpreted as a guarantee of popular liberties never occurred to anyone until the seventeenth century. It is significant that in Shakespeare's *King John* the Great Charter is not even mentioned. The real Charter guarantees next to nothing except feudal privileges. The first clause enacts that the English Church shall be free and enjoy her full rights and liberties. This is often adduced by Anglo-Catholics as a proof that the English Church was then independent of Rome. But it plainly means freedom from royal interference such as had been attempted by John. The notion that Langton or any other medieval primate dreamt of denying the authority of the Pope, or that John, who had just abjectly surrendered his kingdom to the Pope, would have dared to set his seal to such a denial, is too ridiculous to deserve refutation. Other clauses of the Charter protect the baronage against burdensome taxes, fines, forfeitures, and distrains for debt, whether to the king or to the Jews; provide that taxation shall be imposed only by the "common council of the realm" (an assembly of bishops, abbots, and barons, in which the commons were at that date unrepresented); guarantee to chartered towns their "ancient liberties and customs," and to foreign merchants freedom of trade in England; and stipulate that no *free* man shall be punished "but by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land." As the great majority of Englishmen were serfs, this clause is considerably less liberal than might be supposed. Except for an incidental provision that their holdings shall not be seized in payment of fines due to the king, serfs are not mentioned in the Charter at all. Finally, the Charter obliged John to dismiss his foreign mercenaries, and empowered the barons to make war on him if he or his ministers infringed its terms in any respect. His quarrel with the Church

had left him the vassal of Rome; his quarrel with the barons left him in bondage to a feudal oligarchy.

John's surrender to the barons by no means suited Innocent III. The Pope could govern England only through the king of England; and for the king to become the prisoner of the nobility would be fatal to the arrangement. Innocent therefore declared the Charter invalid, excommunicated the barons who had extorted it, and suspended Langton from the archbishopric for his part in the affair. John, dispensed from his oath, took the field again at the head of his mercenaries, and the ensuing anarchy was terminated only by his death a year later.

The struggle for the control of England and its resources continued through the reign of Henry III. The Pope, through John's submission, had become the legal sovereign of this country; and though, after the death of Innocent III, direct papal interference in the government was less, England was too rich a prize not to be exploited to the utmost. Papal nuncios were repeatedly sent to raise money for the Holy See; Italian ecclesiastics were thrust into English benefices; and Italian financiers availed themselves of the Pope's protection to do profitable business with high and low.

It must be remembered that Italy in the thirteenth century was economically far in advance of England. The opening up of the East by the Crusades had enriched the Italian cities first and foremost, those of France, Flanders and the Rhineland next, and England hardly at all. With the growth of commerce went intellectual emancipation. The cities of Italy, especially Milan, were hotbeds of heresy and secret Freethought. It was no accident that the thirteenth century, in which papal ascendancy reached its zenith, saw also the extermination of the Albigenses in southern France and the establishment of the Inquisition. Lombard merchants who were outwardly

orthodox smiled privately at the claim of the Church to direct consciences, especially in the matter which touched them most nearly—the prohibition of interest on money. Ways were found to circumvent the canon law on this subject. A borrower would be asked to sign a receipt for more money than he actually received; or the bond would provide for repayment at an impossibly early date, and compensation be then charged for non-payment by that date. Rome was ready to wink at such subterfuges on condition of sharing the profits, which might run to as much as sixty per cent.

Great was the discontent in England when these Italian financiers appeared in the train of the papal nuncio, doing business with the evident connivance of the Holy Father. Robert Grosseteste, the learned Bishop of Lincoln, who in this and other connections showed himself a better patriot than Papist, roundly called the Pope a heretic for aiding and abetting usury. The Bishop of London excommunicated the financiers and expelled them from his diocese. He was summoned to Rome to answer for his action, and thereafter let these papal protégés alone, “choosing rather,” says Matthew Paris, “like Shem to hide his father’s nakedness than like Ham to uncover it.”¹

We have seen how resentment at the extortion and corruption of the Catholic hierarchy led, especially in the cities of Italy and France, to heretical movements which were kept under only by terror of stake and faggot. Heresy had to be combated by intellectual as well as by carnal weapons; and it was to this necessity as much as to any other cause that medieval universities owed their origin. The university of Oxford seems to have arisen, in imitation of that of Paris, in the reign of Henry II, almost simultaneously with the first recorded persecution of heretics in England; and that of Cambridge somewhat later. An attempt

¹ Matthew Paris, *Chronicles*, year 1235.

to emulate within the Church the poverty and celibacy practised by the heretical teachers and so to restore her credit with the urban populations was made by the Franciscans and other new orders founded early in the thirteenth century. The movement was not altogether welcome to the Papacy. There was an obvious danger that the preaching, and still more the practice, of apostolic poverty by wandering friars might stimulate rather than allay popular criticism of the wealth of the older orders. The rule of absolute poverty laid down by Francis of Assisi was therefore set aside; and by allowing the order to hold corporate property it was assimilated as far as possible to other monastic orders. In spite of this modification of the original rule, it is noteworthy that many of the early Franciscans defied the Papacy and that some were burnt as heretics. Among the English Franciscans were Grosseteste, whose independent attitude to the Papacy has already been noted, and Roger Bacon, whose scientific researches caused him to be suspected of heresy and cost him fourteen years' imprisonment. It should be noted that both Grosseteste and Bacon had been educated at Oxford. Even at this early date the cultivation of secular studies as a weapon against heresy was proving a boomerang to the Church. But such men as Grosseteste and Bacon must not be regarded as typical Franciscans. The papal measures taken to bring the new order to heel were successful. By the fourteenth century the difference between a friar and a monk, if it existed, was no longer visible to the naked eye.

CHAPTER V

THE BIRTH OF ENGLISH NATIONHOOD

FROM the Norman Conquest to the reign of John, England can hardly be said to have existed as a nation. Its rulers were Normans or Angevins, alien to the English in language and tradition, and continental rather than insular in interest. This is still true in the main of Henry III. He counted on the Pope's support for his schemes of dynastic aggrandizement abroad, and lent himself to papal policy in every particular regardless of English grievances.

But in England changes were taking place. The barons had lost their Norman lands in John's wars, and were all the more bent on keeping England for themselves without sharing it with foreigners. The growing tension on this account led to a national movement which temporarily united all who suffered from royal and papal exactions, and which found an unexpected leader in the King's brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester. That Simon should have led a movement against papal aggression is remarkable; for his antecedents were most unpromising. He was not English, but French. His father had been to the fore in the brutal crusade against the Albigenses. Nothing in the younger de Montfort's early career suggested that he would prove to be anything but a typical place-seeking noble and courtier of his time. But he was influenced by the ideas of Grosseteste, and in the end was swept forward by a popular movement which it was beyond the power of any individual to create or destroy.

At first the situation resembled that at the end of John's reign. The council of the realm—or Parlia-

ment, as these assemblies were beginning to be called—met at Oxford in 1258 and succeeded in putting Henry under much the same kind of restraint as had been put on his father at Runnymede. He was forced, among other things, to expel all foreigners from England. As before, the Pope absolved the King from his oath; and as before, the upshot was civil war. There, however, the parallel ended. The majority of the barons were not prepared to push their quarrel with Henry to extremes. It was not they, but the towns, that supplied the driving force of the movement. The towns were increasing in numbers and wealth. Yet they were without a voice in the counsels of the kingdom, were defenceless against royal rapacity, and had been insultingly and injuriously used by Henry, who regarded townsmen as serfs masquerading in usurped privileges and was completely blind to their growing importance. The towns therefore threw their whole weight on to the side of de Montfort. After the battle of Lewes had delivered the King into his hands, a papal bull excommunicating Simon and his adherents was seized by the citizens of Dover, torn up and thrown into the sea. The towns reaped their reward when for the first time two representatives of each city and borough were summoned to sit with bishops, lords, and knights in the great council of the realm.

Within a few months de Montfort lay slain on the field of Evesham, and all acts done by or on the advice of him and his friends were declared null and void. But the precedent was remembered. Henry was old; and his son Edward I, who understood the signs of the times better than his father, made it his business, when he came to the throne, to enlist the towns on his side against the turbulence of the barons and the arrogance of the Church.

The later Middle Ages are marked by a growing clash of interests between the towns and the feudal

lords of the soil. Violent conflict was frequent, especially where towns were situated on ecclesiastical estates; for churchmen were notoriously averse to any abatement of their feudal privileges. At Reading and Bury St. Edmunds, for example, there were constant armed struggles between the abbot's retainers and the townsmen over the respective rights of the abbey and the town to control the market, and similar issues. At Norwich, in 1272, shortly before the death of Henry III, there was an affray in which the citizens looted and partly burnt the monastery. As a result the bishop excommunicated them and put the city under an interdict, several citizens were hanged, and the charter of the city was forfeited to the King. A few years later, under Edward I, a fine was laid on the city to compensate the monastery, after which the citizens received absolution and recovered their charter.

An outstanding example of the arrogance with which the Church enforced her feudal claims occurred in 1280, when the villagers of Micklegate, in Derbyshire, had the temerity to dispute certain services said to be due to the abbot of Burton-on-Trent. The judges decided against them.

"Thereupon the abbot, to show that he was not to be trifled with, instead of demanding a moderate fine, sent a large body of servants, commanded by six monks and five knights, who drove off from the village 27 boars, 140 oxen, 50 cows and heifers, 506 sheep, and 77 pigs—doubtless all the cattle the tenants possessed. They appealed to the king, and Edward I, ready to seize every opportunity for limiting baronial power, issued a writ ordering that the cattle should be restored. Nothing daunted, the abbot ejected ten of the villeins from their holdings."

Repeated writs were in vain. The sheriff had no force to carry them out.

"It was useless—their cattle were still in the abbot's hands, and they felt themselves beaten. Some of them came to the abbot's court and craved forgiveness; they were made to appear at the county court, and there solemnly acknowledge that they were 'serfs at the will of their lord.' But others would not yield, and brought an action for theft; the abbot replied that what he had taken was his own, for being villeins they possessed nothing but their own bodies."

One by one the villagers submitted and craved for pardon.

"Those who came readily were replaced in their holdings, their cattle restored, and only a small fine exacted. But two were obstinate to the last, and would not yield till they had been carried off to Burton and put in the stocks. . . . And then they were pardoned, but made to pay a heavier fine than their neighbours—to wit, half of all the corn then growing on their land."¹

The King's protection had availed these men nothing. In view of the myths circulated by Catholic writers as to the idyllic conditions on monastic estates, and of the impudent modern claim of the Church to be the champion of individual liberty against totalitarianism, these are facts which should be made widely known.

Such was the formidable State within the State which Edward I set himself to curb. To this end he followed de Montfort's example of conciliating the towns. He summoned burgesses to his Parliaments along with the other estates of the realm, and did his best to strengthen them as a political force by creating fifty-four new boroughs during his reign. He met with a

¹ W. J. Ashley, *Introduction to English Economic History and Theory*, pp. 38-40. The account is based on documents in the Burton Chartulary.

certain limited success. Burgesses as well as barons must have warmly welcomed the Statute of Mortmain (1280), which prohibited religious corporations from adding to their landed estates without royal permission. The immediate object was to prevent the wastage of the military strength of the kingdom by the alienation of feudal property to a "dead hand." The King and Parliament, a monkish chronicler complains, "would not understand that the host of the Amalekites was overcome rather by the prayers of Moses than by the might of the children of Israel."¹ A shrewder blow at clerical privilege followed in 1296. In that year the clergy, headed by Robert Winchelsea, Archbishop of Canterbury, availed themselves of a recent bull of Pope Boniface VIII forbidding the taxation of clerics by secular princes, and refused to contribute a penny to Edward's exchequer. "Thereupon," whines the chronicler, "the king turned cruel; and the clergy were so afflicted that the madness of Nero might seem to have come again in England."² In other words, Edward outlawed the whole body of the clergy and confiscated the Archbishop's lands. A hundred years earlier such action would have been met by his excommunication and deposition. But times had changed. The power of the Papacy had passed its apogee. Princes were ceasing to take seriously the pretensions of these greedy and corrupt pontiffs; and the rising middle classes snapped their fingers at them. Boniface was at the same time embroiled with another masterful monarch, Philip IV of France, and did not take up Edward's challenge. The English clergy, finding that there was no help for it, paid their taxes like other mortals; and the archbishop got back his land. A few years later Boniface was made prisoner by the French, threatened and humiliated, and died a broken man. After that, a series of Frenchmen were elected

¹ *Flores Historiarum*, year 1280.

² *Ibid.*, year 1296.

to the Holy See, the seat of the Popes was removed to Avignon, and the glory of medieval Rome departed.

That was the last of Edward's successes against the Church. Parliament was not yet the revolutionary "two-handed engine" which it became in later centuries. The towns do not appear to have greatly valued their right of representation. They had not the consciousness of power or the mutual cohesion to take advantage of it. Some even purchased exemption from the duty of electing members. For the present the main result of Parliamentary representation was to provide the king with a means of levying taxes without undue friction, and so to enable him to dispense with one fiscal expedient on which his predecessors had relied. The Jews, as we have seen, had been admitted into England solely on account of their financial utility to the crown. They had now served their purpose and were of no further use. Edward could draw money from Parliament; and if Parliament was obstreperous, there were the Lombard financiers. In 1290, therefore, the Jews were rounded up and banished from England on pain of death. The wretched outcasts had no friends. Their expulsion greatly increased Edward's popularity; and Parliament voted him a special grant of money on the strength of it.

The most ambitious and laborious enterprise of Edward's reign, and that which most impressed his contemporaries, was the attempt to make himself lord of all Britain by bringing Wales and Scotland under his yoke. In Wales he succeeded. In Scotland, notwithstanding long years of war and rapine, he failed. The inscription on his tomb in Westminster Abbey, *Edwardus primus Scotorum malleus hic est*,¹ does not represent his true title to fame. He deserves rather to be remembered as the first king of England

¹ "Here lies Edward I, hammer of the Scots."

after the Conquest to think and act as an Englishman—as the man who freed England from temporal vassalage to the Pope, and who by the precedent thereby set, perhaps unconsciously, prepared the way for a more complete emancipation.

CHAPTER VI

CATHOLIC DECADENCE

AFTER the removal of the Papacy to Avignon its credit diminished with every year that passed. The Popes were now little more than puppets of the French crown, and showed themselves obedient tools of French diplomacy in the Hundred Years' War, which began a generation later. The result was a growing disbelief in papal pretensions in England and in every other country with national interests opposed to those of France. A sign of the times was the frankly anti-papal attitude of the English schoolman, William of Occam. Occam, like Grosseteste and Roger Bacon, was a Franciscan, and held the opinion of Francis concerning the necessity of absolute poverty to the religious life. Pope John XXII condemned this opinion as heretical. Thereupon Occam charged the Pope himself with heresy, denounced the temporal power of the Papacy, and went so far as to claim authority for the civil power over matrimonial cases, which were then generally regarded as the peculiar concern of the Church. Occam is best known as a philosopher. His famous "razor," *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, may be rendered, "We should not believe in more things than we must," and is a veritable charter of scientific scepticism.

He was at one time imprisoned in the papal dungeons at Avignon, but saved himself from a fiery end by escaping to the court of the Emperor Louis IV, whose political feuds with the Papacy ensured a ready welcome to any heretic. In England itself Parliament showed its opinion of French puppet-Popes by passing statutes like those of Provisors (1351) and Praemunire

(1353), designed to prevent papal interference in English government and administration.

Open revolt against the Papacy was hastened by the catastrophe which descended on Europe half-way through the fourteenth century. Mortality from plague was frequent among the miserable and under-fed peoples of Christendom. In 1347 the Black Death, an epidemic of more than usual virulence, appeared in Europe, and in 1348 it swept England from end to end. Naturally the poor died in greater numbers proportionately than the rich. By the time the contagion had spent its force, villages were depopulated, lands were lying waste, crops were rotting in the fields, and the whole economic life of the country was dislocated. Feudal lords suddenly found that there were not enough men to work for them. Serfs refused to perform their customary service and claimed their freedom; free tenants insisted on reductions in rent; wage-labourers stood out for higher rates. Repeated attempts to compel labourers by statute to work for the old wages on pain of imprisonment and branding proved vain. Repression was met by sullen resentment and resistance. "Since the Statute of Labourers was passed," plaintively declares a monkish chronicler, "labourers have served their masters every day worse than they did before."¹

The history of the years which followed is the history of a struggle on the part of the feudal lords to maintain their position in an impossible economic situation. The greatest of feudal landowners in England and elsewhere was the Catholic Church. The increasing discredit of the Church gradually led to a demand for the confiscation of the swollen wealth of the upper clergy and especially of the monastic orders. This demand was explicitly advanced after 1374 in the writings of Wycliffe. "The evil beast which ascended out of the bottomless pit, the limb of Satan, John

¹ Henry of Knighton, *Chronicle*, year 1352.

Wycliffe or Wicked-belief,"¹ as one chronicler amiably calls him, carried a step farther the line of thought which Grosseteste and Occam (Oxford men like himself) had started. According to Wycliffe property is a stewardship held under God and may lawfully be taken away from unrighteous holders. Since bishops and abbots have shown themselves worldly and wicked their endowments are justly forfeit, and the State as God's agent may properly confiscate them and reduce the Church to apostolic poverty.

Such doctrines found ready ears in widely different walks of life. Many lay landowners, including such great nobles as John of Gaunt, younger son of Edward III, were ready to support the confiscation of Church lands for their own benefit. The rising middle classes, especially in London, were favourable to Wycliffe's teaching; for they, too, were eager to lay hands on the wealth of churchmen for whom they had long ceased to feel any moral respect. How little such respect was owing to the medieval hierarchy may be judged from the fact that the Bishop of Winchester drew a lucrative rental from brothels situated in the London suburb of Southwark. Heretical and free-thinking opinions far in advance of Wycliffe's were beginning to find a hearing among the upper classes. "Certain of them," alleges a chronicler, "believed that there was no God, that the sacrament of the altar was nought, and that there was no resurrection after death."² *The Vision of Piers Plowman* complains that sceptical discussions, in which even "freres" join, take place at rich men's "festes," and that boys are emboldened "to talken of the Trinite" and "fynd forth fantasies" against the faith.³

It is not surprising that the peasantry, exasperated by the various Statutes of Labourers, should have

¹ Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, year 1381.

² *Chronicon Angliae*, year 1381.

³ *Piers Plowman*, XI, 58-63.

found leaders who went further than Wycliffe. John Ball is called by some a disciple of the reformer, but seems in fact to have been in the field many years before him and, like him, to have begun by teaching that property depended on merit and that tithes might lawfully be withheld from priests of unworthy life. By degrees he went on to challenge the whole basis of feudal society. From the splendour and corruption of the medieval Church he appealed to the democratic principles implicit in one side of early Christianity, which by underground and largely heretical channels had somehow been kept alive until the fourteenth century. Inhibited by the bishops from preaching in church, excommunicated, and repeatedly imprisoned, Ball still found willing audiences in the villages of south-eastern England. The whole countryside was astir with disaffection and needed only new provocation to flame into revolt. That provocation was supplied by the poll-tax which Parliament in 1380, under pressure from Richard II's ministers, imposed to meet the expenses of the French war.

The story of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, which swept the whole of eastern England from the Channel to the Wash, has often been told. Here we are concerned only with the part played by the Church. The first act of the men of Kent was to liberate John Ball from Maidstone prison, to which he had been sentenced for life by Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury. Sudbury, besides being Archbishop, was Lord Chancellor, and was one of the three men who governed in the young king's name and were therefore most hated by the insurgents, the other two being John of Gaunt and Sir Robert Hales, the Treasurer. After the insurgents, with Wat Tyler as their leader and Ball as their chaplain, had entered London with the good will of the bulk of the citizens (and incidentally burnt the episcopal brothels at Southwark), Sudbury and Hales were among their

first victims. The temper of the populace is shown in their reply to Sudbury when he threatened them with a papal interdict. "We fear," they said, "neither interdict nor Pope," and hacked off his head.¹ Meanwhile the townsmen of St. Albans rose against their overlord the abbot, and extorted a charter freeing them from feudal dependence on the abbey and granting them rights of free pasture, fishing, fowling, and the like.

It is unnecessary to relate at length here how the revolt, first in London and then in other districts, was extinguished in blood; how the young king went back on his word and revoked the charters of emancipation from serfdom which he had granted a fortnight before; and how John Ball "was broughte to the kynge at Seynte Alban, where he was drawen and quarterde, and wolde not ask mercy and grace of the kynge, but despisede the kynge utterly."² But the sequel at St. Albans is worth relating. Sir Robert Tressilian, the judge deputed to wreak vengeance on the defeated insurgents, empanelled a local grand jury. They refused to indict anyone, until Tressilian threatened them with hanging. Then, in the words of the chronicler,

"the townsmen were troubled, and bethought them that it was more to their health to indict their guilty neighbours than to heap the said evils upon themselves. They indicted many, both of the country and of the town. . . . Then were condemned William Gryndecob, William Cadyngdone, John Barber, and certain other malefactors; . . . and they were drawn and hanged to the number of fifteen. . . .

"It was reported . . . that they that had been hanged at St. Albans had been taken down and

¹ *Chronicon Angliae*, year 1381.

² William Caxton, continuation of Higden's *Polychronicon*.

removed to a distance from the gallows. Our lord the king marvelled much at such boldness, and being exceeding wroth at the despite done to him herein, thereupon sent his writ to the bailiffs of the town of St. Albans. . . . The townsmen were compelled to hang up their fellows again in chains of iron with their own hands, and themselves to suffer the foul stench of their bodies dripping with corruption, rotting with worms, putrid, and stinking.”¹

At Peterborough, where also the town had risen against its abbot, the revolt was put down by Henry le Despenser, Bishop of Norwich. He, we are told,

“paid the malefactors as they deserved, to wit some with death, others with prison and bonds, sparing none. Many of them took flight to a church for safety, but fell into the pit of destruction which they had digged for the Church; for they had not deserved sanctuary in a church who feared not to destroy the Church. Certain of them were stabbed with lances and swords at the altar and by the walls, both within and without the church. . . . Likewise did that valiant bishop at divers places in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.”²

It is difficult to say whether the savagery of the bishop, or the glee with which the monkish chronicler relates it, provides the more eloquent comment on the modern pretence that the Church in the Middle Ages was the friend of the people and the architect of their liberties.

An immediate effect of the revolt was to close the ranks of the privileged orders against every kind of dangerous doctrine. Wycliffe was implicated inas-

¹ *Chronicon Angliae*, year 1381.

² Knighton, *Chronicle*, year 1381.

much as he had once taught that "servants and tenants may withdraw their services and rents from their lords that live openly a cursed life."¹ Moreover his campaign for the disendowment of the clergy had led him at last to assault the central Catholic dogma of transubstantiation. A movement which sought to deprive the Church of her temporal possessions was bound sooner or later to face this issue. Thousands of pious bequests had been made to the Church in order that masses might be said for the souls of the testators. If the daily miracle by which the priest "made his Maker" were, as many privately suspected, a fable and a sham, such bequests rested on fraud, and the monks and clergy held their property on false pretences. Such was now Wycliffe's opinion. Since 1378, when the schism between Rome and Avignon had robbed the Papacy of its last rags of moral prestige, he had openly denounced the doctrine of transubstantiation as a blasphemous deceit, an imposition on the people, and an occasion of idolatry. But whatever their private views on this matter, the lay nobility were thoroughly frightened by the Peasants' Revolt, and revolutionary doctrines of any sort were at a discount. In vain did Wycliffe repudiate the insurrection and declare that "the king and realm were bound to destroy traitors to the realm."² He received no further support from John of Gaunt and his peers.

After Wycliffe's death, in 1384, his followers, the Lollards, though still strongly supported in London and other towns, and not without friends among the smaller gentry and peasantry, found no favour with the governing class. Courtiers and men of the world viewed the ecclesiastical racket with a tolerant amusement, which is reflected in the portraits of the monk, the friar, the summoner, and the pardoner in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The monk, it will be recalled,

¹ Cited by H. de B. Gibbins, *Industry in England*, p. 162.

² *Chronicon Angliae*, year 1382.

"Gaf not of the text a pulled hen,
 That saith, that hunters ben not holy men,
 Ne that a monk, when he is rekkeles,
 Is like to a fish that is waterles;
 This is to say, a monk out of his cloistre.
 This ilke text held he not worth an oistre . . .
 Therefore a horsman ever he was aright;
 Greyhoundes he had as swifte as fowl in flight;
 Of prickying and of huntyng for the hare
 Was his delight, for no cost wolde he spare."

The friar

"was an esy man to geve penance
 When that he thought to have a good pitance.
 For unto a poore ordre for to give
 Is signe that a man is wel i-shrive."

The summoner

"was a gentil felaw and a kynde;
 A better summoner shulde men nowher fynde.
 He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn
 A good felawe to have his concubyn
 A twelve month, and excuse him utterly."

The pardoner has with him a wallet

"Brim-ful of pardouns come from Rome al hot,"

and "reliques," comprising "pigges bones" and other trash, whereby

"Upon a day he gat him more moneye
 Than that the parsoun gat in monthes tweye."

But that the common people should continue to believe in the sanctity of such monks, the authenticity of such relics, and the efficacy of such pardons was vital to the interests of the tottering feudal order.

In the fourteenth century the "knights of the shire," who represented the smaller landholders in Parliament, had begun to make common cause with the borough members and to deliberate with them in a common chamber, the House of Commons. The Commons now, when taxation was under discussion, from time to time proposed to confiscate the property

of the Church. The king and Lords supported the clergy in their resistance; and for the present the matter went no further. But from the reign of Richard II onward this political and economic feud between the Church and the Commons recurs like a *leitmotif* in the disharmony of medieval life. The tension inherent in the situation was the more acute in that letters were now no longer a clerical monopoly. The growing wealth of the merchant class and their rising impatience with the claims of the clergy had led to the foundation of grammar schools controlled by town guilds and not by monks or priests. The Church had to fight to keep the younger generation under her control. Hence William of Wykeham's foundation of New College, Oxford, on a larger scale and housing more scholars than any of the six colleges which preceded it, and of Winchester College as its annexe, expressly designed to train "pore and needy scholars" for the Church. The precedent was followed fifty years later in the case of King's, Cambridge, and Eton. Thus the English university and public school system arose as part of the mechanism of defence of the established order in Church and State.

Under Henry IV, who relied chiefly on the Church to support his shaky title to the throne, a systematic persecution of heretics was inaugurated by the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo*. This made it the duty of the sheriffs to burn at the stake all persons sentenced for heresy by the bishops. The authorities did not even wait for the bill to reach the statute-book. Before it became law a London priest, William Sawtre, convicted of Lollard preaching, was burnt alive at Smithfield by a writ of the king and Lords. Till then executions for heresy had been very rare in England. Thenceforward they became increasingly common. As the old order grew more rotten and discredited, it became more ferocious in self-defence.

The House of Commons had obediently voted for

the burning of heretics, but were loth to abandon their designs on Church lands. Faced by continual demands for money from Henry, in 1404 they once more proposed confiscation. Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury (the main author of the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo*), defended his order, arguing that the masses and prayers of the clergy were as important to the king as the military service of the laity. An angry altercation followed between Arundel and Sir John Cheyne, Speaker of the Commons, himself an unfrocked cleric.

“Hereupon the Speaker of the knights¹ showed publicly by his countenance and voice that he rated lightly the prayers of the Church. ‘Now,’ said my lord of Canterbury, ‘I see plainly whither the fortune of the realm tends, when prayers, whereby the Godhead is wont to be entreated, are set aside and cheaply rated. . . . Howbeit think not, thou who ratest cheaply the profession of the clergy, that thou shalt rob unpunished the possessions of the Church; for if Canterbury lives, thou shalt pay dearly for anything that thou stealest of his.’”²

The king and the Lords temporal came to the rescue of the clergy, and the matter dropped. In 1410 an attempt by the Commons to revive the project was thwarted by Henry, Prince of Wales, who forbade them to raise the question of confiscation again. The prohibition was effective; for the Commons were still in a very real sense the Lower House, and could not afford to defy the heir apparent. An attack on benefit of clergy and a demand for the amendment or repeal of the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo* proved equally vain. On all such matters the great feudal interests stood shoulder to shoulder.

¹ Knights of the shire.

² Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, year 1404.

The Lollards were now exposed to the full fury of persecution. Most of the victims were men of the people who expressed their dissent from the official religion with a bluntness resembling that of modern Secularists. Such a man was John Badby, an artisan, who in his tirades against transubstantiation declared that "if every host consecrated at the altar were the Lord's body, then there be twenty thousand Gods in England," and that a consecrated wafer was "a lifeless thing, inferior to a toad or a spider, which are live animals." For such utterances as these Arundel, in 1410, condemned him to the stake at Smithfield. The faggots were ablaze when Prince Henry, who was present, moved by Badby's cries, had them removed and offered him a pardon and threepence a day for life if he would acknowledge the host to be the body of Christ. He refused, and in the words of an unpitying chronicler "was burnt to ashes and departed into everlasting fire."

The only man of rank to adhere to the Lollards in their day of trial was Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. He was long protected from attack by his friendship with Prince Henry. But on succeeding to the throne as Henry V, that cold-hearted prince abandoned him to the merciless Arundel. Oldcastle's condemnation was followed by the one notable insurrection to which the Lollard movement gave rise. Oldcastle escaped from the Tower and put himself at its head. Thousands of London citizens, journeymen, and apprentices were ready to rise for him as their fathers had risen for Wat Tyler. Their object was to seize the person of the king and to enforce a reformation of Church and State. But Henry had wind of the plan and caused the gates of London to be shut and guarded, thus preventing a junction between the Londoners within and Oldcastle and his men without. The movement petered out in panic. London was overawed. Oldcastle's men fled, and his lieutenants were taken and

hanged or burnt alive. He himself escaped, and in spite of a heavy price on his head eluded capture for over three years. Then he was tracked down, brought to London, and, after trial by his peers, hanged and burnt on the gallows.

That ended the Lollards as a political force. They lingered on as a persecuted sect until, a century later, they were caught up in the larger movement of the Reformation. The legend of Oldcastle persisted in a more or less distorted form long enough to provide Shakespeare with a very faint historical basis for the burlesque figure of Falstaff.¹ Henry soon found means to "busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels," and to win as the victor of Agincourt the popularity which he had not earned as the roaster of Lollards. Nothing in fact could restore the credit of the medieval Church. There was nothing to choose between the French churchmen who in 1431, for political reasons, burnt Joan of Arc as a heretic and a witch, and the French churchmen who in 1450, for political reasons, rehabilitated her as an inspired saint. The Church was ready to oblige in such matters any ruler, English or French, who would enforce its dogmas and protect its revenues; and kings and nobles were usually ready to carry out their side of the bargain.

" Right as in thi bodi
Ben ordeyned thin hondis
Ffor thin heed and for thi feet
And for thin eyen to wirken,
Right so the comoun peple
God hath disposid,
To laboren for holi chirche
And lordshipis also." ²

But now a new order was stirring in the womb of the old, and forces were at work for its delivery.

¹ Shakespeare, however, is careful to disavow the intention of burlesquing a Protestant hero. "Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." ² *Henry IV*, Epilogue.

² *Political Songs and Poems of the Middle Ages*, edited by Thomas Wright.

Merchant adventurers were steering by the mariner's compass on voyages of discovery. The feudal nobility of England, beaten out of France, liquidated one another in the Wars of the Roses. Monkish Latin chronicles were being supplanted by English books written by laymen like William Caxton for a lay public; and Caxton's printing-press made them available to all who could afford to go to school. By the end of the fifteenth century the New World was discovered, and a new dynasty was on the throne, destined to smash the power of the Church, create a new governing class, and usher in a new era of English history.

CHAPTER VII

DIES IRAE

At the opening of the sixteenth century the power of the Catholic Church was to all appearance unshaken, though the Papacy was in great disrepute. The unabashed corruption of the papal court and the polished scepticism of the Renaissance combined to strip the Holy See of any aura of sanctity. The Popes were very wealthy, very vicious, and very astute Italian rulers, but, as Vicars of Christ, were unconvincing. The strength of the Church, however, lay not in the reputation of the Pope, but in the enormous material resources wielded by her in every corner of Western Christendom, in the traditional association of her rites and feasts with popular custom and sentiment, and in her consequent utility as a buttress of secular authority. Her weakness lay in the smouldering resentment felt by the educated laity, above all by the middle classes of the towns, at her multifarious exactions. A monarch choosing to ally himself with these classes, and without a strong baronage to put him in fear, might defy the Church with impunity.

The extent of this anti-clerical feeling was illustrated in London in 1514, when a merchant tailor named Richard Hun refused to pay a mortuary (a customary offering payable out of the estate of a deceased person) claimed by his parish priest. Hun was accused of heresy and imprisoned in the Lollards' Tower at St. Paul's Cathedral, where soon afterwards he was found hanged in his cell. It may well be that he took his life in order to escape the fire of Smithfield. But a coroner's jury returned a verdict of murder against William Horsey, chancellor to the Bishop of London,

and two other men. Thereupon the Bishop, Richard Fitzjames, wrote to Thomas Wolsey (not yet cardinal, but already all-powerful with Henry VIII) in the following terms :—

“ I beseche your good lordship to stande so good lord unto my poore chaunceller nowe in warde, and endited by an untrewed quest for the death of Richard Hun, . . . that by your intercession it may please the kynges grace to have the matter duly and sufficiently examined by indifferent persones of his discrete counsayll in the presence of the parties, or there be any more done in that cause. . . . For assured I am, if my Chaunceller be tryed by any xii men in London, they be so maliciously set in favour of heretical pravity, that they wyll cast and condempne any clerke, though he were as innocent as Abell.”¹

Wolsey used his influence; and the king's attorney did not proceed with the trial.

Such disputes with the priesthood, such charges of heresy, and such interferences with the course of law were no doubt common in Western Europe. The Lutheran movement in Germany fired a train that was already laid. In 1517 Luther nailed to the church door at Wittenberg his theses against the sale of indulgences. In 1520 he repudiated the Pope's authority and denounced papal Rome as “ the greatest thief and robber that has ever appeared on earth, or ever will.”² Instantly that mass of opinion in the West that had long chafed under ecclesiastical exactions became vocal and active. Luther's pamphlets were imported into England; and the persecuted Lollards, who for generations had carried on underground propaganda in London and elsewhere, knew that another Wycliffe had arisen.

¹ Hall's Chronicle, 6 Henry VIII.

² Luther, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.

But the alliance between Church and king was still unbroken, and few in England were ready to risk the stake by openly attacking the clergy. Henry, as yet a pleasure-loving man of thirty, and little dreaming of the subversive rôle which he was to play in later years, in 1521 entered the lists against Luther with his *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, and was repaid by Leo X—that cultivated and corrupt sceptic—with the title of Defender of the Faith. Lutheran tracts, and now and then a live Lutheran, were committed to the flames. For the present, public unrest showed itself only in resistance to the heavy war taxation imposed by Wolsey. The Cardinal was hated by high and low. His downfall was the one thing needed to open the floodgates of religious revolution.

It was not long delayed. Much as Henry cherished religion, he cherished his dynasty more. Like so many of his contemporaries (including Wolsey and Leo X himself), Henry was syphilitic; and during twenty years of married life all his children, except his daughter Mary, had died in infancy. The Wars of the Roses were within living memory; and all peaceable subjects dreaded the event if Henry should die with none but a girl to succeed him. Desire for a male heir led him to seek the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Such annulments (amounting in practice, though not in theory, to divorce) were and are by no means uncommon in the Church of Rome. In Henry's case a colourable ground was supplied by Catherine's previous marriage to his elder brother. He would no doubt have had his wish, as many Catholic monarchs and persons of rank have had theirs in the like case, if Pope Clement VII had not at that time been politically dependent on Catherine's nephew, the Emperor Charles V. Unable to obtain a divorce from Rome, Henry, in 1529, decided to be his own Pope. Wolsey did not mind a divorce, but would not be a party to schism. He was abruptly

flung aside, and was saved from trial for treason only by his death in the following year.

The knowledge that Henry intended to break with Rome, and that grievances against the Church could now be vented without incurring the suspicion of heresy, released those pent-up forces of lay resentment which ever since the days of Wycliffe had waited for this time of reckoning. Landowners who envied the Church her enormous territorial wealth, merchants who objected to the competition of the abbeyes in the wool trade, reformers who disapproved of clerical pluralism and absenteeism, and plain laymen who resented the fees and fines payable to the clergy on death and on probate of wills, all felt that their day had come. Shortly after Wolsey fell, a new Parliament met. Let Hall relate the sequel :—

“When the commons were assembled in the nether house, thei began to common of their grefes wherwith the spirituality had before time greuously oppressed them, . . . and in especial thei were sore moved with sixe greate causes.

“The first for the excesse fynes, which the ordinaries¹ toke for probat of Testamentes . . .

“The second cause was the great polling and extreme exaccion, which the spirituall men used in takyng of corps presentes or mortuaries . . .

“The third cause was, that priestes beyng surveiors, stuardes and officers to Bishoppes, Abbotes, and other spiritual heddes, had and occupied Fermes, Graunges, and grasing in every contrey, so that the poore husbandmen coulede have nothyng but of them, and yet for that they should pay derely.

“The fourth cause was that Abbotes, Priors and spiritual men kept Tanne houses, and bought and sould woll, clothe and all maner

¹ Bishops.

of marchaundise as other temporal marchauntes did."

The fifth and sixth "grefes" related to non-resident clergy and to pluralism.

"These thinges before this time might in nowise be touched nor yet talked of by no man except he would be made an heritike, or lese al that he had, for the bishopes were chauncelers, and had all the rule about the kyng, so that no man durst once presume to attempt any thing contrary to their profit, or commoditie."

A bill on mortuaries was first passed and sent to the Lords.

"Within two daies after was sent up the bill concerning probates of Testementes, at the which the Archbishop of Cauntorburie¹ . . . and all other bishoppes in generall both frowned and grunted, for that touched their proffite, insomuch as Doctor Jhon Fisher, bishop of Rochester, saied openlie in the Parliament chambre . . . My Lordes, you se daily what billes come hither from the common house, and all is to the destruction of the church. . . . Now with the Commons is nothing but doune with the Church, and all this me semeth is for lacke of faith only."

Ecclesiastics at that time predominated in the House of Lords, and the Bills "remayned unconcluded a while." But the Commons made sure of Henry's support by assenting to the cancellation of debts which he had incurred in the City of London a few years before. Henry in return put pressure on the Lords to pass Bills limiting the amounts payable in mortuaries and probate dues.

"After these Actes thus agreed, the Commons

¹ William Warham.

made a nother acte for pluralities of benefices, none residence, biyng and selling and takyng of fermes by spirituall persones, which acte so displeased the spiritualtie that the priestes railed on the commons . . . and called them heretikes, and scismatikes, for the which diverse priestes were ponished . . . Whiche bill . . . was wholly agreed to in the lordes house, to the great rejoisying of the lay people, and to the greате displeasor of the spirituall persones.”¹

Much has been written of the “servility” of Tudor Parliaments. Hall in fact tells us that of the House of Commons which passed these Acts “the most parte were the kynges servauntes.” It does not follow that they were unrepresentative of the burgesses and country gentlemen who elected them. Tudor policy rested on the solidarity of the monarchy and these classes against the Church and baronage. The Commons had the government they desired. They had shown independence enough a few years before in resisting Wolsey’s taxation. Now that Henry was adopting their policy, they were not disposed to be pedantic constitutionalists.

Sure of the support of the Commons, Henry proceeded to sharper measures. In 1531 the whole body of the clergy were declared to have violated the Statute of Praemunire by submitting to Wolsey as papal legate. As the price of pardon they were compelled to pay a fine of £100,000 and to acknowledge the king to be the supreme head of the English Church. A further series of Acts of Parliament forbade all payments and appeals to Rome, transferred the appointment of bishops to the king,² and declared it high treason to deny the royal supremacy or to call the

¹ Hall’s Chronicle, 21 Henry VIII.

² Technically bishops are elected by the cathedral chapter of the diocese. But the chapter, on receiving the royal *conge d’élire*, must elect the royal nominee or incur the penalties of Praemunire.

king a "heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel, or usurper." By 1534 the schism with Rome was complete. The Defender of the Faith had become, in the eyes of all Catholic Christendom, an excommunicated apostate.

In all this, except for the matter of papal supremacy, there was no alteration of Catholic doctrine or formularies. Henry still detested Luther's theology. The faithful Commons did not care a straw for dogma so long as they could lay hands on the material wealth of the Church. Sir Thomas More, who had succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, was in his way as paradoxical an embodiment of the conflict between old and new as Henry himself. In his *Utopia* he had written in favour of toleration and expressed startlingly liberal views on religion. But as Chancellor he continued to harry heretics as Wolsey had done, and in 1532 resigned office rather than follow Henry further in his anti-papal policy. In 1535 More and Fisher were beheaded on Tower Hill for denying the royal supremacy, while the prior and several monks of the London Charterhouse were hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn for the same offence. Lutherans, Anabaptists, and other deviators from Henry's standard of orthodoxy continued to be burnt at Smithfield. He was determined that the Reformation should halt, if possible, at a point convenient to himself. Neither he nor his Parliament intended to encourage common folk to cultivate private judgment in religion or anything else.

The breach with Rome being now complete, Henry proceeded to the most momentous act of his reign—the replenishment of his exchequer and the further enrichment of his landed and moneyed subjects by the plunder of the monasteries. The laxity and corruption of the religious orders had been a byword since the age of Wycliffe and Chaucer. Monkish ignorance had long been a butt to the men of the new learning. Henry's chief assistant in this revolution, Thomas

Cromwell, is notable as the first middle-class Englishman to rise to a great position in the State otherwise than through the Church. The son of a brewer, he had spent his youth in soldiering and trade, made large sums as a money-lender, entered Parliament, taken service first with Wolsey and then with Henry, and risen to be Secretary and Master of the Rolls. In 1535 commissioners were appointed to look for scandals in the monasteries. From what we know of medieval monasteries, we may conclude that there was no difficulty in finding what they sought. In 1536 the smaller monasteries were dissolved by Parliament and their property confiscated. The greater shared their fate a little later. Their treasuries were sacked, their venerated images smashed and burnt, their fraudulent relics exposed to public contempt. Part of their treasure was spent on national defence, in particular on the development of the Navy. Their lands were given away to Henry's courtiers or sold at cheap rates to rich purchasers.

In this way a new ruling class sprang into being. Such families as the Russells, the Cavendishes, the Paulets, the Greshams, the Pagets, and the Cecils, who before were simple knights, squires, merchants, or even yeomen, rose to fortune on grants or sales of abbey lands and came to form a new nobility with a strong vested interest in the Reformation. Some abbeys passed into still more plebeian hands and uses. That of Malmesbury, for example, was sold to a rich clothier of the name of Stump and turned into a factory. As if to underline the secular motives of the Reformation, a number of Catholic holidays were abolished, "and specially such as fell in the harvest tyme, the keeping of whiche was muche to the hinder-auce of the gatheryng in of corne, haye, fruite, and other suchelike necessary and profitable commodities."¹

Such measures suited down to the ground the

¹ Hall's Chronicle, 28 Henry VIII.

merchants, clothiers, and other moneyed men turned landed proprietors who were rapidly on the rise in southern and eastern England, which was at that time the richer and more populous half of the country. It was far otherwise north of the Trent. Here feudalism was still in the saddle, and towns were still small and dependent on the lords of the manor. To great feudal families like the Percys of Northumberland the Reformation spelt the rise of rich upstarts and the ousting of a friendly and familiar abbot in favour of some detestable city merchant. In 1536, after the smaller monasteries had been dissolved, but before the greater had been touched, there was an abortive Catholic rising in Lincolnshire, followed by a much more formidable rebellion in Yorkshire under Robert Aske, a local landowner, supported by certain of the northern lords. This movement, known as the "Pilgrimage of Grace," had for its object the restoration of the abbeys and the old religion, the expulsion of counsellors of the Cromwell and Russell type, and the replacement of the old nobility in power. The rebels had cannon; and the whole country north of the Humber was soon in their hands. Henry was in real danger and was compelled to make a show of concession. Having thus weakened the movement, he rounded on them, repudiated his promises, and treacherously arrested Aske, who was tried for high treason and executed at York. The usual bloody vengeance was wreaked on his followers. The effect of the rising was to hasten the doom of the remaining monasteries.

The history of the rest of Henry's reign is little more than a horrible tale of proscription and blood. With grim impartiality Catholics who denied the royal supremacy were hanged and quartered as traitors, and Protestants who denied transubstantiation were roasted as heretics. But the new men whom Henry had gorged with the spoils of the monasteries were well content.

It was they, the most articulate and literate class in England, who wrote the history of his reign and created the legend of "bluff king Hal." Henry had made their dream come true. He had delivered the goods which they had long coveted. The fat, syphilitic old sadist retained their loyalty and gratitude to the end.

Much indignation has been wasted over the dissolution of the monasteries. Chesterton in *The Secret People* summarizes the history of the time in a few impassioned lines :—

"The blood ran red to Bosworth and the high French lords went down;

There was nought but a naked people under a naked crown.

And the eyes of the King's Servants turned terribly every way,

And the gold of the King's Servants rose higher every day.

They burnt the homes of the shaven men, that had been quaint and kind,

Till there was no bed in a monk's house, nor food that man could find.

The inns of God where no man paid, that were the wall of the weak,
The King's Servants ate them all. And still we did not speak."

We have seen in previous chapters how "quaint and kind" the "shaven men" had been in their days of power. We have seen what a "wall of the weak" the abbot of Burton was to the villeins of Micklegate, and how idyllic were the relations between monks and townsmen at St. Albans and at Peterborough. Henry VIII was a ruthless man. Pity is due to many of his victims. It is due to some, at least, of the luckless women whom he raised to queenhood and divorced or beheaded in his vain quest of a healthy heir. It is due to many who died cruelly for their honest opinions. It is due to the thirteen London apprentices who suffered the barbarous penalty of high treason for having, under great provocation, mobbed foreign merchants on the "evil May Day" of 1517. It is due to the peasants evicted from their homes to make room for sheep farms, and liable under the savage

enactments of Henry's Parliament to be "tied to the cart-tail" as "valiant beggars" and "whipped until the blood streamed from their bodies," on a second conviction to have half their right ears sliced off, and on a third to be hanged. It is due to the 72,000 persons said to have been actually hanged for theft in this reign, and to the masses impoverished by the debasement of the currency, to which Henry resorted again and again in order to supply his needs. But no pity is due to the proud hierarchy which had dominated England for over a thousand years, and which now, in the day of wrath, was trampled into the dust. The phrase "the patrimony of the poor," sometimes used of the wealth of the medieval Church, has as much sincerity in it as the Pope's title of "servant of the servants of God" or a modern business firm's boast that "our motto is service." The religious orders had enjoyed power and abused it, and they paid the penalty. We may say of them, in the words used in the Gospels of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand: "The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof."

CHAPTER VIII

END OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

WITH Henry's death, in 1547, the Reformation quickened its pace. The religious settlement which he had imposed was artificial and unstable in the extreme. It was impossible to destroy the economic and political power of the Catholic Church in England and yet to continue indefinitely enforcing with stake and faggot those theological dogmas by which the Church had tried to rationalize and justify her power. Moreover, the ambitions of the new rich were by no means exhausted. They had shared out the wealth of the monasteries. Now came the turn of the guilds. These local craft corporations had served to protect the infant industry of medieval towns, but merely hampered the adventurous merchant of the sixteenth century. A loop-hole of attack was afforded by the fact that guild revenues were commonly devoted in part to the provision of masses for the dead and to other purposes which could be represented as superstitious. On the accession of Edward VI all property used for such objects was confiscated, and the guilds ceased to be more than ornamental vestiges of a dead past. The fact that the London livery companies were able to redeem their property for a lump sum of £20,000 merely shows the power of money in shaping the course of the Tudor revolution.

It would be unjust to represent the Reformers as consisting wholly or even mainly of rich men bent on loot. The Reformation rallied to its banner a number of widely different interests, ranging from scholars impatient of priestly imposture to plain burgesses resentful of clerical interference in their daily lives, and

from rich men covetous of Church land to poor men demanding social equality in the name of the Gospel. Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who governed as Protector in the name of the nine-year-old king, was an enlightened but weak man, genuinely averse to cruelty and wrong, and favouring religious toleration. He made a good beginning by procuring the repeal of the laws for burning heretics. But his idealism was helpless against the partisan fury which was the legacy of long and cruel persecution. The Protestants, on being given an inch, took an ell. In 1549 the first English Prayer Book, the work of Cranmer and Ridley, was imposed on the country by law, and the Latin Mass prohibited. The new liturgy was of a sort which we should now describe as Anglo-Catholic and showed a tendency to compromise. It retained the name "mass" for the communion service, contained prayers for the dead, allowed reservation of the sacrament for the sick, and was conservative in the matter of ritual. But the mere fact that it was in English was enough to provoke trouble in backward districts which clung to the old hocus-pocus.

The thorough subordination of religious to secular considerations is shown by an Act passed in the same year to encourage the fishing industry. After repudiating the Catholic doctrine of fast-days, the Act nevertheless imposes a fine and imprisonment on anyone not observing them, in order that "fishers, and men using the trade of living by fishing in the sea, may thereby the rather be set on work, and that by eating of fish much flesh shall be saved and increased."

The way of the Reformers was made more difficult by their total failure to deal with the mass of social discontent provoked by the eviction of peasants and enclosure of commons by grasping landlords. Somerset's attempt to enforce the Acts against enclosure merely earned for him the deadly enmity of the unprincipled men who were his colleagues in the Govern-

ment. Simultaneous insurrections without any common plan broke out in 1549 in different parts of England. In the north and west, Catholic landowners and priests were able to side-track the peasant movement into a demand for the restoration and re-enforcement of Catholicism, and social grievances were thrust into the background. In the east, where by this time Catholicism seems to have lost all hold on the people, the revolt was wholly on the social issue and was a much more formidable affair. It was in fact the greatest popular upheaval seen in England since the days of Wat Tyler. The Government was able, with the help of German mercenaries, to crush the rebels in all districts. The leaders, whether Catholics like Arundell in Cornwall or ultra-reformers like Ket in Norfolk, were impartially executed. The net result, however, was to deprive the Government of whatever national backing it had and to open the way to Catholic reaction. Somerset's colleagues, who had helped themselves to abbey lands under Henry and whose sole interest now was to hold what they had won, combined against him, deprived him of office, and sent him to the Tower and eventually to the scaffold. The most unprincipled of them all, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, tried to rally the Protestants to him by radical changes in the liturgy, and on Edward's death, in 1553, played for high stakes, but miserably failed and paid with his head, professing himself a Catholic at the end. The others—Russell, Paulet, Paget, Cavendish—rattled from a sinking ship and had no difficulty in retaining under Mary the favour and employment which they had enjoyed under Henry and Edward.

The eventual victory of the Reformation in England was in no way due to the mental or moral stature of its leaders. The quality of its statesmen we have already seen. Of their clerical instruments Thomas Cranmer is one of the most unlovable, if pitiable,

figures in English history. Dragged by Henry from academic seclusion and thrust into the archbishopric of Canterbury in order that he might put through the divorce from Catherine of Aragon, this unhappy man thenceforth made himself the obedient instrument of Henry's matrimonial manœuvres and ecclesiastical experiments. Though by conviction a reformer, Cranmer, like many in those times, believed in the divine right of princes to prescribe the religious professions of their subjects and to persecute heresy to the death, and was in the end tragically hoist with his own petard. Of his henchmen, Hugh Latimer is the most worthy of respect. Latimer had a racy eloquence and a sense of humour, never forgot his yeoman origin, on occasion stood up to Henry himself, and alone among the leading reformers spoke out against the rent-raising and enclosure which were the great cause of social misery in the sixteenth century. His popular following was great, his influence on policy small.

The accession of Mary provided a golden opportunity to undo the work of the Reformation. But the net effect of her short reign was to make the reconversion of England to Catholicism for ever impossible. She was able to carry Parliament with her in reimposing Catholic worship, reviving papal supremacy, and re-enacting the heresy laws, but only at the price of a bull from Julius III dispensing the holders of abbey lands from any obligation to restore them. Protected in their possessions by this all-important guarantee, the abbey-snatchers in Parliament assembled knelt to the Queen's cousin, Cardinal Pole, for absolution from the sins of heresy and schism, and allowed some three hundred persons, poorer but honester than themselves, to be burnt alive for failing to display an equal agility of conscience. London, the old stronghold of Lollard tradition, provided the largest number of Protestant martyrs, and the eastern

counties most of the rest. The result was to breed in the traders and yeomen farmers of the south and east a deep hatred not only of Catholicism, but of any form of priestcraft, and to make their descendants the driving force of Puritanism in the next century. To these obscure victims, rather than to Cranmer, Ridley, or even Latimer, England owes her Protestantism. Yet Oxford, the "home of lost causes," was never more so than when Latimer and Ridley, after long examination by divines of the university, were burnt outside her gates, and when Cranmer half redeemed his servile past by the courage of his last hour.¹

The final victory of the Reformation on Mary's death was inevitable. Even if she had not burnt a single heretic, her Spanish marriage would have made shipwreck of her policy. English merchants chafed at the Iberian monopoly of the trade of the New World and resented an alliance which prevented them from breaking it. The accession of Elizabeth was their opportunity. Moreover, the repudiation of papal supremacy was necessary in Elizabeth's own interest; for if the Pope's authority in England were admitted, it followed that Henry VIII's divorce was unlawful, his marriage to Anne Boleyn invalid, and Elizabeth illegitimate and without any title to the crown. She was therefore forced to lean for support on the Protestants of south-eastern England, the one large class of her subjects who could be relied upon determinedly to resist all papal claims.

But to have gone the whole way with the Protestants would have meant civil war. Moreover, Elizabeth was far from being a Protestant zealot. During Mary's reign she had conformed and waited her time. Though indifferent to dogma, she was fond of ritual, disliked a married clergy, and above all had no wish, if

¹ It is significant that Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, and other Protestant notables were nearly all Cambridge men. East Anglia, the centre of the wool trade, had been a hotbed of revolt in the later Middle Ages, and its proximity infected the university.

she could help it, to goad the north and west into a new rebellion by unnecessary interference with their beliefs and habits. Advised by William Cecil, a typical statesman of the new governing class called into being by the Tudors, she imposed a compromise designed to minimize opposition from right or left. She refused her father's title of supreme head of the English Church, and took instead that of "supreme governor as well in spiritual and ecclesiastical causes as temporal," explaining to the Spanish ambassador that "she did not intend to be called head of the Church, but could not let her subjects' money be carried out of the realm by the Pope any more."¹ In practice it was a distinction without a difference. The use of the English Prayer Book was enforced again by law. Failure to attend the English service was punished by a fine, and attendance at Mass by imprisonment. Clerical marriage was tolerated, but not explicitly legalized. Ecclesiastics and public officials were required by Act of Parliament to take the oath of supremacy.

The mass of the nation were accustomed to dictation in the matter of religion and passively accepted the new order. None the less, the change was revolutionary, and it proved impossible to impose it without the use of force. All the bishops but one refused the oath of supremacy and were deprived of their sees. Some fled abroad, others were imprisoned for life. Most of the lower clergy profited by the warning; but a small minority, probably not more than one in forty or fifty (though some Catholics claim one in five), refused the oath and were ejected from their livings.² In the early years of Elizabeth the penalties of the law were not rigorously enforced, and many of the deprived clergy were allowed to function as

¹ Creighton, *Queen Elizabeth*, p. 52.

² The original Vicar of Bray belongs to this period. His name was Simon Aleyne. He held the living under Henry, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth with a whole skin and, let us hope, a good conscience.

chaplains to Catholic gentry. Not until Catholic attempts at counter-revolution endangered Elizabeth's throne did she and Cecil turn to a policy of terror.

The Protestant stalwarts would gladly have seen more drastic measures. The Reformation on the Continent had moved far since the time of Luther. Calvin had elaborated its principles into a coherent and imposing system based on the fundamental dogmas of the absolute sovereignty of God, the total depravity of man, and the predestination of men to salvation or perdition by the eternal purpose of God. All this had been taught by Paul and Augustine, and was in no way peculiar to Calvin. But he deduced far-reaching consequences—notably the nullity of all human authority in matters of religion except only that of the church or congregation of the elect; the right of the congregation, therefore, to choose its pastors and teachers without the intervention of prince or bishop; and the sinfulness of all Catholic usages, including Catholic holidays and the popular amusements associated with them. Doctrines so congenial to hard-headed business men found a warm welcome in the city of Geneva, then engaged in a stubborn fight for independence against its bishop; and Calvin became its prophet and oracle. Geneva swarmed with Protestant refugees from France, England, Scotland, and the Netherlands, who returned to their own countries as missionaries of Calvinism. In England the Puritans, as they came to be called, were strong in London and other centres of industry, where they were reinforced by many Dutch, Flemish, and French immigrants who settled here to avoid persecution. For the present, Puritan agitation beat in vain against the stone wall of Elizabethan statecraft. But its appearance marked the beginning of the end of that alliance between the monarchy and the middle classes which had carried through the English Reformation.

While the middle classes were turning to Calvinism

as their charter of emancipation from priestcraft, opinions hated and persecuted by both Rome and Geneva were beginning to make headway among petty tradesmen and artisans. As early as the reign of Henry VIII a number of Anabaptists, immigrants from Holland, had been burnt in different towns of England. By 1560 the continued activity of this sect led the Government of Elizabeth to issue a proclamation banishing them from England within twenty days on pain of imprisonment and confiscation of goods. The Anabaptists interpreted Scripture according to their personal inspiration or "inner light," and consequently exhibit a considerable variety of doctrine. Some denied the divinity of Christ; others his humanity. Many denied the Trinity; many advocated Communism. But all agreed in repudiating existing governments as anti-Christian, in denying the authority of the State to prescribe religion, in refusing to bear arms or take an oath, and in rejecting infant baptism as useless and therefore rebaptizing their converts (whence the name "Anabaptist"). Elizabeth's proclamation failed to stop Anabaptist propaganda in England, particularly among the poorer classes of East Anglia. Here within a few years we meet with such sects as the Family of Love, who "attenuated all Scriptures into Allegories, and made them aery, empty, nothing,"¹ and the more extreme Family of the Mount, who "questioned whether there were an heaven or an hell, but what is in this life," and "believed that all things come by nature."²

The menace of the stake still deterred all but the boldest from such speculations. But the seed of Freethought had been scattered. The overthrow of the medieval Church was the first step in a revolt against authority which was to know no halting-place short of modern materialism.

¹ Fuller, *Church History of Britain*.

² Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, year 1575.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION

THE key to the history of Scotland until the eighteenth century is her poverty. Throughout the Middle Ages, and for long afterwards, that country was economically and politically behind England. This had its advantages and its disadvantages. On the one hand, Scotland never offered the tempting bait that England did to foreign aggression. There was no Norman conquest of Scotland; there was only a sporadic influx of Anglo-Norman adventurers who took service with Scottish kings and were granted lands north of the border. The claims of English kings to suzerainty over the country, though often made, were not resolutely enforced, and after Bannockburn were practically nugatory. Above all, Scotland never became a fief of the Pope, and was never exposed to the assiduous papal aggression which England suffered in the thirteenth century. On the other hand, Scotland never developed, as England did, a strong central government capable of ending feudal anarchy. No Scottish king ever succeeded in reducing the nobility to order and subjection as the Tudors did in England. Scottish history down to the union of the crowns is a tale of almost unmitigated turbulence and ruffianism.

The medieval Church in Scotland was what it was in England, but on a smaller scale. Its bishoprics and abbeys were as lavishly endowed with land as the slenderer resources of the country permitted. As in England, the corruption of the religious orders brought them into odium and contempt, while their wealth offered an even more tempting prey to the penurious

laity of the northern kingdom. But in Scotland there was no such organ as the House of Commons to focus lay discontent. The Scottish Parliament consisted of a single chamber in which bishops, abbots, earls, and barons outnumbered the representatives of the small and backward burghs. In practice Parliament delegated its powers to a committee known as the "Lords of the Articles" and became no more than an instrument of the dominant noble faction. In the fifteenth century the Lollard movement, infiltrating from England into Scotland, led to a few martyrdoms and to the foundation of the university of St. Andrews as a bulwark against it. As in other countries, this latter weapon recoiled against the Church that wielded it.

The Scottish monarchy, having no strong middle class to pit against Church and baronage, remained faithful to Rome long after the English Reformation was in full swing. The result was that the Protestant party in Scotland looked to England for support, while Church and crown, with equal inevitability, leant to the "auld alliance" with France. The religious quarrel became thus inextricably mixed up with the interplay of English and French power-politics. Another result was that the Scottish Reformation, when it came, was carried out, not by royal authority, but in spite of it, and was therefore more popular, more violent, and more extreme than the English. In 1543, during the infancy of Mary Stuart, the English and Protestant party gained the upper hand and sacked a few religious houses. The outbreak was soon put down. But the appetite of the reformers was whetted. The cruel and corrupt Cardinal Beaton, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Chancellor of Scotland, was murdered in his castle by a gang of bloody-minded Protestant lairds, while the preaching of John Knox (who had sat at the feet of Calvin) and kindred spirits fell on fruitful soil among the Scottish laity. In 1557 the Protestant nobles, taking the name of "Lords of the Congrega-

tion," put themselves at the head of the movement. In the next two years images were burnt and monasteries pillaged by the mob in different Scottish towns. But French troops still stood between the Protestants in Scotland and total victory. Naturally Knox and the other leaders appealed to England for aid.

Little as Elizabeth liked Calvinism, she liked her cousin Mary Stuart even less. Mary was, by marriage, Queen of France as well as Scotland, and thus embodied in her person that alliance which had troubled English rulers for centuries. Not only so, but she was heir presumptive to the throne of England, and was indeed already its rightful queen in her own eyes and in those of Catholics who denied the legitimacy of Elizabeth. In 1560, therefore, Elizabeth overlooked Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (which had not been meant for her) and sent English money and English troops to his rescue. The French were driven out of Scotland and the country delivered into the hands of the Calvinists.

The Scottish Parliament, now dominated by the Lords of the Congregation, proceeded without the royal consent to abolish papal jurisdiction; to prohibit the saying and hearing of Mass on pain of confiscation of goods for the first offence, exile for the second, and death for the third; and to sanction a Calvinist confession of faith. Meanwhile, without Parliamentary authority, local reformed congregations spread and organized. Before the year was out a General Assembly of representatives of these "particular kirks" had met and provided Scotland, in fact, if not in theory, with a more effective organ of national initiative than her Parliament had ever been.

The plan of Church government drawn up by Knox was modelled on that of Calvin at Geneva. In it, to use the apt phrase of Engels, "the kingdom of God was republicanized." Ministers and elders were to

be elected by their congregations; the revenues of the Church were to be divided between the maintenance of the ministers, the relief of the poor, and the education of the young; and the Church was to exercise an absolute moral discipline over rich and poor. Actually Knox's plan was only half put into operation. The Protestant lords had seized the lands of the old Church for themselves and refused to part with them. That they should do so, they told Knox, was "devout imagination." The result was that Knox's scheme of national education was never carried out. Nevertheless, so far as it went, the Reformation was effective. The Scottish middle classes, for the first time in their history, had a weapon with which to oppose the Crown and the aristocracy. Mary, on the death of her French husband in 1561, returned to Scotland to find that while she might reign and the nobles might brawl and intrigue, a new force was in being against which she was powerless to contend. When Knox, in reply to her question whether subjects might resist their princes, told her that if princes exceeded their bounds they might be resisted and even deposed, and to her indignant challenge, "What are you within this commonwealth?" answered, "Madam, a subject born within the same," a new era in European history had opened.

Mary had to accept the accomplished fact and to be content with the liberty, which Knox was unable to take from her, of hearing Mass in her private chapel. Her subsequent misfortunes, on which much misplaced sentiment has been wasted, were due not to her religion, but to her utter fecklessness and recklessness. Whether a Catholic reaction in Scotland was by that time possible or not, a woman who could mismanage her affairs as she did was the last person in the world to head it. Having ruined her own cause by her matrimonial mistakes and escapades, she was in 1568 driven from Scotland straight into the clutches of

Elizabeth's gaolers, leaving her enemies, the insurgent nobles and the General Assembly, to settle their mutual differences as they could.

Those differences related chiefly to Church government. The nobles, who had amassed fortunes by the seizure of Church property, were determined to de-republicanize the kingdom of God and to reduce the new Kirk to a state of dependence on themselves. In this they were supported by the successive regents who governed in the name of the young James VI, and in later years by James himself. They were prepared at a pinch to allow ministers to draw their tithes, but they insisted on the reintroduction of lay patronage and preferred episcopacy to Presbyterianism. They were able, in spite of Knox, to impose a form of episcopacy on the Kirk in the shape of the so-called "tulchan" or "calf-skin bishops"—dignitaries whose sole function was to draw the income of an episcopal see and to pay over the major part to the noble lords who were their patrons. The General Assembly, on the other hand, never ceased to kick against these attempts to "nobbles" the Reformation in the interests of the crown and aristocracy. The issue was not decided until after the history of Scotland had become merged with that of England.

The Scottish Reformation took place in a backward country subject to chronic feudal anarchy and amid a peasantry steeped in primitive superstition. Hence its many forbidding features—the intolerance of its clerics, the rapacity and treachery of its lay leaders, its continuance of the horrible cruelty of witch-burning. It must be remembered, however, that witch-burning was not the invention of the Reformers, but a legacy from Catholicism. The procedure for the examination and condemnation of witches had been elaborated by the Inquisition in the later Middle Ages and formally sanctioned by the Papacy. It is sometimes said that witch-hunts increased as a result of the

translation of the Bible into the vernacular. But the inerrancy of Scripture was common ground to Catholics and Reformers. They differed only in its interpretation. It is deplorable and appalling that the men who led the way in smashing the medieval Church, and thereby prepared the ground for modern Rationalism, should in this vital particular not have reformed, but imitated, the evil past. It is above all deplorable and appalling that in Scotland, where the Reformation was pre-eminently a people's movement, this hideous superstition should have died out so late. But there is no reason to suppose that the Reformation prolonged these horrors. The burning of witches continued to a later date in Catholic than in Protestant countries, and died out last of all in Spain and in Spanish America. The frequency of witch trials and executions in Scotland must be attributed to the poverty and ignorance of her people and to the late period at which trade and industry, science and settled government, spread to her northern fastnesses. By giving to Scottish burghers and peasants a voice in public affairs which they had not previously possessed, by training them in discussion and controversy, and by breaking the tradition of feudal subordination, Knox and his fellow-fighters paved the way for men who would surmount their limitations, and built better than they knew.

CHAPTER X

THE ELIZABETHAN TERROR

MEANWHILE Rome had no intention of giving up England or Scotland for lost. The greater part of the old nobility and the mass of the peasantry in the north and west of England were still Catholic at heart. To foreign observers and to Catholic exiles it seemed impossible that the domination of heretical upstarts like Cecil and his kind could endure. Abroad, the odds against the Reformation were overwhelming. The entire economic and military resources of the great Spanish Empire were at the service of the old religion. Philip II was the secular head of Catholic reaction in Europe. Not only did he hold Spain itself and its vast possessions in the New World, but he threatened England from the Netherlands and dominated Italy by his possession of Naples and Milan. Paul IV (1555-1559) was the last pontiff who resisted the ascendancy of the "accursed Spaniards." The next four Popes were to all intents and purposes Spanish chaplains. Religious conformity was enforced throughout the Spanish dominions by the hideous machine of the Inquisition. Catholic doctrine was redefined and underlined by the Council of Trent in such a way as to exclude all possibility of compromise with the reformed Churches. The Jesuits, with their quasi-military organization, operated as a "fifth column" in every reformed country to win over waverers (especially if rich and influential) and prepare the way for counter-revolution. England was the key to Europe. If Jesuit arts or, failing them, Spanish arms could regain England for the Church, other countries would not hold out for long.

An additional weapon was afforded to Catholic reaction by the internal difficulties of reformed countries. The discovery of silver in the New World had led to a universal rise in prices. This did not distress merchant adventurers who could make fortunes out of the slave trade and the loot of the Spanish Main, or the courtiers of Elizabeth who took shares in their enterprises. But it impoverished the feudal families of the north of England and aggravated the social misery already caused by the conversion of tillage into pasture. In 1569 two Catholic earls, Percy of Northumberland and Neville of Westmorland, led a new Pilgrimage of Grace. They issued a manifesto charging Elizabeth's counsellors with seeking the destruction of the nobility, and sought to rally the suffering peasantry by marching under banners with the device, "God speed the plough." They were easily beaten, and fled to Scotland. A bloody assize was held in the north, and Northumberland was eventually given up to Elizabeth and paid with his head. The crushing defeat of the northern earls drove the Catholic opposition in England underground. It was thenceforth reduced to conspiratorial tactics and to the hope of Spanish intervention. In 1570 Pius V published a bull against Elizabeth, "the pretended queen of England," in which, after describing her as a rebel against the Holy See, who had made England an asylum for the scum of Europe and discarded her noble counsellors for low-born heretics, he declared her excommunicated and deposed, and absolved her subjects from their allegiance. Elizabeth and Cecil, soon to become Lord Burghley, replied by a policy of terror. In 1571 all persons asserting the power of the Pope to depose sovereigns, and all persons saying or hearing Mass, were declared by Act of Parliament to be guilty of high treason. To cow the old nobility, their premier peer, the Duke of Norfolk (albeit a professed Protestant), was beheaded in 1572 for

treasonable communications with Philip II and with the captive Queen of Scots.

Not only Catholics fell victims to the Elizabethan terror. Every dissenter from the Established Church was now, in the opinion of the Government, a danger to the State. To deal with the sectaries of London and East Anglia the stake and faggot, which had fallen out of use since the death of Mary Tudor, were put again into operation. In 1575 "two Dutchmen Anabaptists were burned in Smithfield, who died in great horror with roing and crieng."¹ What alarmed the Government most was that they would not acknowledge Elizabeth's counsellors to be Christian magistrates. John Foxe, the author of the *Book of Martyrs*, pleaded with the Queen in vain against this revival of her sister's cruelties.

The following years witnessed a series of martyrdoms in East Anglia which illustrate the spread of Freethought. In 1579—

"Matthew Hamont, by his trade a ploughwrite of Hetharset three miles from Norwich, was convented before the bishop of Norwich, for that he denied Christ our saviour. At the time of his appearance it was objected that he had published these heresies following. That the new testament and gospell of Christ are but meere foolishnesse, a storie of man, or rather a meere fable. Item, that man is restored to grace by Gods meere mercie, without the meane of Christs blood, death and passion. Item, that Christ is not God nor the saviour of the world, but a meere man, a sinfull man, and an abhominable idoll. Item, that all they that worship him are abhominable idolaters, and that Christ did not rise againe from death to life by the power of his godhead, neither that he ascended into heaven.

¹ Holinshed's Chronicles, 17 Elizabeth.

"Item, that the Holie ghost is not God, neither that there is anie such Holie ghost. Item, that baptisme is not necessarie in the church of God, neither the use of the sacrament of the bodie and bloud of Christ. For the which heresies he was condemned in the consistorie, and sentence was pronounced against him by the bishop of Norwich on the thirteenth daie of Aprill, and ther upon delivered to the shiriffes of Norwich. And bicause he spake words of blasphemie (not to be recited) against the queenes majestie and others of hir councell, he was by the recorder, master sergeant Windham, and the maior sir Robert Wood of Norwich condemned to lose both his eares, which were cut off on the thirteenth of Maie in the market place of Norwich, and afterwards, to wit on the twentieth of Maie, he was burned in the castell dich of Norwich." ¹

In 1583 John Lewes was burnt at Norwich for "denieng the godhead of Christ, and holding divers other detestable heresies." ²

In the same year—

"Elias Thackar tailor was hanged at saint Edmunds burie in Suffolke on the fourth of June, and John Coping shoemaker on the sixt of the same moneth, for spreading and mainteining certeine bookes seditiouslie penned by one Robert Browne against the received booke of English common praier, established by the lawes of this realme. Their books (so manie as could be found) were burned before them." ³

Robert Browne, whose books thus attracted the disagreeable attention of the authorities, was a Cambridge man and a kinsman of the Cecils who, without departing from doctrinal orthodoxy, contended for

¹ Continuation of Holinshed's Chronicles, 21 Elizabeth.

² Ibid., 25 Elizabeth.

³ Ibid.

the right of each congregation to elect its officers and manage its affairs without the intervention of the State or its episcopal nominees. The Brownists, later better known as Independents or Congregationalists, spread rapidly in eastern England and in 1593 were said by Sir Walter Raleigh to number nearly twenty thousand. Browne himself was saved by the influence of Burghley from anything worse than imprisonment, and in his later years conformed to the Established Church; but his followers suffered much in the Elizabethan terror and were to play a memorable part in the revolution of the next century.

In 1588 Francis Ket, a fellow and tutor of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was burnt for "divers detestable opinions against Christ our Saviour."¹ Christopher Marlowe was educated at Corpus and may have imbibed from Ket the opinions which later brought him, too, into danger. Giordano Bruno lived in England from 1583 to 1585 under the protection of the French Ambassador, and doubtless helped to familiarize court circles with philosophical speculations far beyond the bounds of orthodoxy prescribed for the common people. To such men as Walter Raleigh, Philip Sidney, Fulke Greville, and Francis Bacon, Anglicanism was no more than a necessary political expedient. But opinions tolerated in courtiers were a matter for prosecution when indiscreetly vented by a shoemaker's son. Marlowe was marked down for arrest, and might have been sent to the stake if he had not been killed in a tavern quarrel before the law could reach him. The Church of England, like the Church of Rome, was watered with the blood of heretics.

Such persecution of advanced thinkers was bad policy in a Government fighting with its back to the wall against Catholic reaction. Its unwisdom was demonstrated on the continent of Europe, where at

¹ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, Vol. III, Book III, Ch. XVII.

that time the Counter-Reformation was scoring formidable victories. The Lutheran and Calvinist princes who proscribed the Anabaptists did not convert them. Finding that there was nothing to choose between Catholic and Protestant persecutors, these sectaries abandoned the struggle; the Reformation lost popular support, and large areas of central Europe reverted to Catholicism almost without a blow.

Against the Catholics Elizabeth could at least claim to be waging a war of self-defence. In 1580 Rome launched a double offensive. Two Jesuits, Robert Parsons and Edmund Campion, both fairly recent converts from Anglicanism, were sent with some others on a secret mission to England. Simultaneously a force of seven hundred Spaniards and Italians landed in Ireland to assist the rebel Earl of Desmond. The invaders were forced to surrender, and most of them were put to the sword. Of the Jesuits, Parsons, the cleverest, got safely back to Rome, while Campion and some of his companions were tracked down, arrested, racked to extort confessions, tried for high treason, and hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn. Burghley defended these severities in a document stating that the Jesuits had suffered as traitors, that they had been racked in strict moderation and only because they were already known to be guilty of treason, and that no one had been put to death for religion. Having regard to the Anabaptists and others whom, both before and after this, Burghley sent to the stake for their opinions, it is impossible to acquit him of hypocrisy. But in the case of the Jesuits, however much we deplore the barbarity of Elizabethan judicial methods, it is difficult to see how a mission to England, undertaken by Englishmen in the service of a Pope who had solemnly deposed Elizabeth and incited her subjects to rebellion, could be treated as other than treasonable. The Catholic pretence that

the "Tyburn martyrs" suffered for their faith alone is fundamentally dishonest.

Much has been written of the loyalty displayed by the Catholic gentry of England on the approach of the Spanish Armada in 1588. It has even been said that Lord Howard of Effingham, who commanded the English fleet, was a Catholic. Howard, though he came of a Catholic family, had consistently taken the Protestant side in public life, serving against the northern earls and sitting in judgment on the Babington conspirators and the Queen of Scots. As to the Catholic gentry, their loyalty was never put to the test. The English exiles abroad were enthusiastic for Spain. The leading Catholic nobleman, Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, was in the Tower praying for the success of the Armada. No one can say what would have been the attitude of his co-religionists if a Spanish army had landed. It would have been a miracle if they had not risen to support it.

The least defensible, and in the long run least successful, part of Elizabethan policy was the colonization of Ireland. Down to the Reformation the Irish had not been conspicuously good Catholics. But the English adventurers who conquered Ireland in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I did unwittingly what neither Patrick nor Henry II had been able to do. They transformed a semi-tribal, semi-feudal people, whose customs and beliefs still contained a considerable ingredient of primitive paganism, into the most faithful and fanatical Catholics in Christendom. There was a real case for English intervention in Ireland. Irish feudal magnates like Desmond, with their incessant private wars, were a considerable nuisance; and there was an ever-present possibility that Spain might make Ireland a base of operations against England. Had Elizabeth occupied strategic points and clipped the claws of the Desmonds, but left the Irish their land and their native institutions, it is un-

likely that they would have taken up arms for a Church to which up till then they had been but indifferently loyal. Elizabeth had more sense than to attempt to force the English Prayer Book on tribesmen who spoke Gaelic, and in religious matters showed herself more tolerant in Ireland than in England. The factors which bedevilled her policy were economic and political. Elizabethan adventurers seized half a million acres of Irish land, reduced the Irish to tenants at will, and in the process massacred men, women, and children, destroyed crops, and drove the wretched people to famine and cannibalism. It is small wonder if after thirty years of that sort of thing the Irish began to identify England and the Protestant religion with tyranny and rapine, and mistakenly to look to the Catholic Church for freedom and fair dealing. For the criminal blunders of that time, Ireland, England, and mankind are paying to this day.

CHAPTER XI

PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION

UNDER Henry VIII and Elizabeth the new aristocracy, ennobled by the Tudors, had made a religious settlement agreeable to themselves. The Reformation had feathered their nests. Not only had they shared out the abbey lands, but chartered companies, membership of which was wholly or mainly confined to London merchants and highly-placed shareholders, directed the profits of foreign commerce safely into their pockets, and even internal trade was subject to monopolies granted to courtiers for some alleged public object or as a mere mark of favour. Lesser men had to be content with the crumbs which fell from their table. As their charters and patents were derived from the crown, the monopolists naturally took a high view of the royal prerogative. The theory of the divine right of kings suited them admirably, since the power nominally vested in the monarch was in practice delegated to them. Naturally, too, they saw in the Church of England, administered by bishops who were royal nominees, an excellent instrument for discouraging "dangerous thoughts" among the common herd. The Church of England was in fact a religious monopoly, exercising the same privileges in the sphere of opinion as the East India Company in the pepper and clove trade, or the ill-fated Earl of Essex in the import of sweet wines. Not only were the bishops still armed with medieval powers of persecution, but at a time when the majority of the people were still illiterate, and when church attendance was compulsory, the pulpit played a major part in the formation of public opinion. The control of "preach-

ing and prophesying" was as important an issue in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the control of the Press to-day.

The bulk of the middle classes naturally viewed the matter very differently from the privileged minority. Dislike of monopolies in trade and of episcopal dictation in religion combined to produce a formidable body of discontent. As in the late Middle Ages, so again in the seventeenth century, that discontent found a natural vehicle in the House of Commons. Parliamentary representation, indeed, was very imperfect. Many towns had been ruined by the economic changes of the last two centuries; and their members had become mere nominees of neighbouring landowners or of the crown. But most members still reflected the opinions of at any rate their more prosperous constituents. Those opinions, in the matter of religion, were Calvinistic or, as men then said, Puritan. The middle classes had no use for bishops whose business was to tune the pulpits on behalf of the King. They wanted to hear sermons to their own taste, not the Government's. They wanted to get rid of the remnant of Catholic usages, and in particular to do away with all holidays except Sunday, or at least to have them made optional. Six days a week, in their opinion, should be devoted wholly to business, and the seventh day wholly to edification. The idea of toleration or of the separation of Church and State had as yet entered the heads of only a tiny minority.

The cleavage of interest between the monopolists and the Puritan middle classes was already becoming marked in the last years of Elizabeth. When James VI of Scotland came south to cut what figure he could as James I of Great Britain and Ireland, he lost no time in showing where his sympathies lay. He granted monopolies with a profusion which put Elizabeth quite in the shade, and dismissed the Puritans and their grievances with scant ceremony. "No

bishop," he told them, "no king." The effect was to drive them into chronic opposition to the crown.

Though neither party believed in toleration, the growing estrangement between them in fact made for it. Those years saw the last attempt ever made by English rulers to enforce religious conformity by stake and faggot. In 1611 a cloth-dealer named Bartholomew Legate, and his brother Thomas Legate, were arrested for denying the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Thomas died in Newgate; but Bartholomew was brought before the King. James greatly fancied himself as a theologian and welcomed the chance of displaying his learning at the expense of a cloth-dealer. The contest was too much for the royal temper. On Legate declaring that he had not prayed to Christ for seven years, James (according to his own account given to Archbishop Ussher) "spurn'd him with his foot, saying, 'Away, base fellow, it shall never be said that one stayeth in my presence that hath never prayed to our Saviour for seven years together.'" Legate was tried before the Bishop of London and delivered to the secular arm. There was a difference of opinion among James's advisers as to the legality of burning him. The statute *De haeretico comburendo* had been repealed on the accession of Elizabeth; and although Anabaptists and others had in fact been burnt in her reign, the right of the crown to do so was now disputed. Sir Edward Coke, Chief Justice of Common Pleas, advised against it; but other lawyers who were consulted, including (to his everlasting shame) Bacon, as Solicitor-General, truckled to what they knew to be the royal wish. Legate was burnt at Smithfield in 1612. A few days later Edward Wightman, an Anabaptist condemned by Richard Neile, Bishop of Lichfield, for "blasphemies against the Trinity," suffered in that town. Among those active in the proceedings against him was Neile's chaplain, William Laud. When Wightman was first

brought to the stake, the crowd nearly rescued him and the execution had to be postponed. It was eventually carried out in the teeth of public opinion. "Such burning of Hereticks," says Fuller, "much startled common people, pitying all in pain, and prone to asperse justice itself with cruelty, because of the novelty and hideousnesse of the punishment."¹ The townsfolk of Lichfield were not Anabaptists, but they were Puritans and ready to take the part of anyone against churchmen. The temper of the people warned James and his bishops that such weapons might recoil on their users. No more heretics were burnt; and when a few years later a Spaniard in England was condemned for views similar to Legate's, he was reprieved and imprisoned for life.

The burning of heretics would doubtless have continued if the relations between court and country had been good. But those relations were increasingly bad. James's grants of monopolies, his sales of baronetcies and peerages, his favourites, his readiness to ally himself with Spain in the interest of what he conceived to be peace and order in Europe, all combined to antagonize a middle class who remembered regretfully the Spanish loot that had flowed into England under Elizabeth, and who saw in the Thirty Years War a golden opportunity to revive that heyday of lucrative piracy. Puritan lampoonists fumed with indignation at a professedly Protestant King and court who, instead of going to the help of the Lord against the mighty, collaborated with the common enemy.

"A Protestant is he that, by degrees,
Climbs every Office; knows the proper fees
They give and take at entrance of the Place,
And at what rate again they vent that grace;
Knows in how many years a man may gather
Enough to make himself a reverend father,
Or from the lowest civil step arise
To sit with honour in the starry skies :

¹ Fuller, *Church History of Britain*.

For he hath gone that Progress, step by step,
As snails creep up where safely none can leap;
For snails do leave behind their silver slime,
And guild the way for falling as they climb . . .
A Protestant no other fault can spy
In all Rome's bead-roll of iniquity,
But that, of late, they do profess King-killing;
Which Catholic point to credit he's unwilling,
Only because he gains by Kings far more
Than he can hope for by the Romish whore . . .
And therefore leaving this out of their Creed,
He in the rest with them is soon agreed."¹

The rift widened when Charles I, on his accession, married a Catholic French princess and made Laud, the sworn enemy of the Puritans, his intimate counsellor, first as a diocesan bishop and finally as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud considered himself a Protestant and, though twice offered a cardinal's hat as the price of reconciliation to Rome, never accepted the papal claims. But he was much nearer to Rome than to the Puritans. Like James, Charles, and all the court party, he believed in the divine right of kings and in their absolute title to impose on their subjects what form of religion they pleased. A Catholic king had a right to impose Catholicism, an Anglican king to impose Anglicanism. That the Roman and Anglican Churches should differ on the subject of papal supremacy was, no doubt, regrettable. But both, in Laud's view, were branches of the true Church. Both believed in authority and order. Catholicism, as the religion of the Queen and of many of the best families in England, might be quietly tolerated, and its good points—a seemly ritual to impress the vulgar, and an end to disputes on doctrine—might be grafted by royal authority on to the national Church pending ultimate reunion. With the Puritans it was altogether different. A Puritan, to Laud, was a low brawler who revered neither crown nor mitre. With such

¹ *The Interpreter: Wherein three principal Terms of State, much mistaken by the vulgar, are clearly unfolded.* From *Stuart Tracts*, edited by C. H. Firth.

there could be no peace. Puritan preachers must be suppressed; and the laity must learn that kingly power was ordained by God and that they who resisted would receive to themselves damnation.

In practice the policy of Charles and Laud spelt forced loans, imprisonment without trial, arbitrary taxation, the indefinite adjournment of Parliament, new monopolies, the tuning of the pulpits to silence criticism, and the use of the Star Chamber as an engine of repression against high and low. Laud and his fellow-bishops could no longer employ the rack and the stake. No heretic had been burnt since Wightman; and the rack had been pronounced illegal by the judges when Charles and Laud desired to use it on Felton, the assassin of Buckingham. But minor forms of sadism like pillorying, whipping, and ear-cropping were still open to them.

Modern admirers of the Stuarts often depict them as champions of the common people against the machinations of a selfish oligarchy of rich men. Laud certainly made a great show of enforcing the acts of previous reigns against enclosure and depopulation; but in reality all that was done was to compound with the guilty on payment of a fine, thus turning infractions of the law into one more source of revenue. What, indeed, could be expected when Charles himself was a signal offender? The enclosure of Richmond Park, in 1636, in the teeth of owners and commoners who objected to the loss of their land threw Laud into consternation. But Charles had to have his deer park. The work was carried out to the "murmur and noise," says Clarendon, "of the people who were not concerned as well as of them who were, and it was too near London not to be the common discourse."¹ So much for the social reforms which, we are nowadays assured, would have made England happy if her monarchs had been given more rein by their wicked

¹ Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, I, 210.

Parliaments! We need have no illusions about the unlovely side of Puritanism. It is very difficult indeed to like such men as William Prynne, who had his ears cropped twice over for publishing attacks on the drama and other popular amusements. But it is significant that, while on the first occasion the mob viewed Prynne's ordeal with indifference, on the second occasion he and his companions were popular heroes. Laud could make Londoners like even Prynne.

But it was Scotland, not England, which dealt the first blow at royal and episcopal autocracy. Under James and Charles the struggle between the Crown and the Scottish middle classes was chronic. James had at length succeeded in imposing episcopal government on the Kirk and in enforcing the observance of the traditional festivals of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Whitsun. Charles went further and suppressed the General Assembly, the only effective organ of public opinion then existing in Scotland. The King, however, was handicapped by his absence south of the border and by the considerable power still wielded by the Scottish nobility. Charles had alienated most of these by announcing his intention to take back the Church lands which they had seized at the Reformation. When, therefore, prompted by Laud, he determined to complete the assimilation of the ecclesiastical régime of Scotland to that of England, he had no means of enforcing his policy. In 1637 the first use of the Prayer Book in Edinburgh led to a riot. The nobility threw in their lot with the people; a provisional Government was set up; and in 1638 nobles, lairds, burghers, and ministers in great numbers signed the National Covenant, by which they pledged themselves to defend the reformed religion to the death and to resist all errors and corruptions. A General Assembly met at Glasgow in defiance of royal authority, abolished the hated holidays, repudiated the

Prayer Book, deposed the bishops, and re-established Presbyterianism. The King's writ no longer ran in Scotland, and England was a powder magazine which might at any moment be ignited by a spark from the blazing north.

Charles and his advisers completely misread the situation. They thought that it would be necessary only to appeal to English patriotism in order to overwhelm the Scots by superior force. They found, to their pained surprise, that the English would not fight in a "bishop's war." So little had Laud profited by experience that in 1639 he and his crony Neile, now Archbishop of York, actually meditated burning alive a stonemason, John Trendall, who had uttered heretical opinions. The idea was abandoned, or overruled. Laud soon found more pressing matters to deal with than the heresies of stonemasons. After the dissolution of the Short Parliament (convoked in 1640 to vote supplies for the Scottish war and dissolved in three weeks as unmanageable) a mob of five hundred London journeymen and apprentices, breathing curses against Laud, marched on Lambeth Palace and broke the windows, but were beaten off with firearms. The Government threw legality to the winds and put one of the ringleaders, a glover named John Archer, on the rack—evidently to no purpose, as only he and one other were hanged. The war with the Scots went ill. The blue bonnets of the Covenanters came over the border, and the whole country north of the Tees fell into their hands. Charles was bankrupt and desperate. The Long Parliament met, and the English Revolution began.

CHAPTER XII

REVOLUTION

WITH the meeting of the Long Parliament the Puritan middle classes of England, who for eleven years had been bound and gagged in the interests of the court, the Church, and the monopolists, recovered their freedom and their voice. To expect moderation in such circumstances was to expect too much of human nature. The Laudian régime of pillorying, whipping, and ear-cropping was not calculated to sweeten the temper. That Strafford and Laud would be impeached, that the Star Chamber would be abolished and its victims indemnified at the expense of their judges, that monopolies would be voted unlawful, and that members who had been connected with them would be declared incapable of sitting, almost went without saying. These measures were all taken in the early days of the Long Parliament and met with little or no opposition.

The parting of the ways came when the question arose of guarantees for the future. In every revolution there is a party which believes in the possibility, once the initial victory is won, of peaceful collaboration with the defeated interests, and a party which does not. Men like Edward Hyde and Viscount Falkland, in common with the majority of the larger landowners and wealthier merchants, believed in the royal prerogative and in the episcopal government of the Church. Episcopacy might or might not be of divine institution, but it was a guarantee that the Church would be administered by men of their own class. Their objection to Presbyterianism was well expressed in a

petition presented to the House of Lords in 1641 by the gentlemen of Cheshire :—

“ We who are now governed by the Canon and civil law dispensed by twenty-six ordinaries¹ . . . should become exposed to the mere arbitrary government of a numerous Presbytery, who, together with their ruling elders, will arise to near forty thousand Church governors. . . . The consequences would prove the utter loss of learning and laws, which must necessarily produce an extermination of nobility, gentry, and order, if not of religion.”²

Still more did they object to the opening of the pulpits, as a Royalist member put it, to “ Taylors, Shoemakers, Braziers, Feltmakers,” and other artisan sectaries.³ Episcopacy was a guarantee against that. Falkland expressed the mind of his party in that and every later age in the words : “ Where it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.”

But the majority of the House of Commons, and with them the middle classes in the country, did not believe in the possibility of halting matters. Their only safety, they considered, lay in depriving Charles of all power and in reducing him to a mere rubber stamp (as we should now term it) for the decrees of Parliament. Episcopacy, as the instrument of royal dictation in religion, must go too. Moreover, the confiscation of episcopal and cathedral revenues would mean material relief to the taxpayer; and the discontinuance of Church festivals and holidays would add substantially to the profits of trade. Men like Pym and Hampden, themselves solid country gentlemen with little of the Puritan about them and nothing of the extremist, gave their support to these revolutionary

¹ Bishops.

² S. R. Gardiner, *History of England*, Chap. XCVI.

³ Sir E. Dering in the House of Commons, November, 1641.

measures from distrust of Charles and fear of the forces of reaction—especially Catholic reaction—which were ranged behind him. The Grand Remonstrance, voted in 1641 and published as a manifesto to the nation, demanded Parliamentary control of ministerial appointments and the reference of the Church question to an assembly of divines approved by the Commons. Middle-class citizens of London threw themselves into the struggle and petitioned, or armed their apprentices and sent them by the thousand to demonstrate against bishops and “rotten-hearted, popish lords.” Then followed Charles’s attempt to arrest the five members, his withdrawal to the north, and the beginning of the Civil War.

A cool review of the events disposes of the fiction sedulously propagated by Catholic and other Stuart apologists, that the Civil War was a struggle between a popular monarch and a gang of greedy plutocrats. Chesterton, in *The Secret People*, expresses it in his usual slapdash style :—

“ And the face of the King’s Servants grew greater than the King :
He tricked them, and they trapped him, and stood round him in a
ring.

The new grave lords closed round him, that had eaten the abbey’s
fruits,

And the men of the new religion, with their bibles in their boots ;

We saw their shoulders moving, to menace or discuss,

And some were pure and some were vile ; but none took heed of us.

We saw the King as they killed him, and his face was proud and
pale ;

And a few men talked of freedom, while England talked of ale.”

The theory that “ the new grave lords that had eaten the abbey’s fruits ”—that is the families enriched by the Reformation and ennobled by the Tudors—were the chief opponents of Charles or even an important element in the opposition will not bear a moment’s examination. Of those families which owed their rise to the pillage of the monasteries a century before, the Russells wobbled from side to side, torn between fear of Catholic reaction and of popular revolution.

Their head, the Earl of Bedford, fought for Parliament at Edgehill, then for the King at Newbury, and then quitted the fray, to re-emerge in his old age as a Whig and be made first Duke of Bedford by William III. The Cecils played for safety and lay low. The grandson of the great Burghley is described as "a man of no words, except in hunting and hawking," whose chief concern it was to be left by the winning side in possession of Hatfield. But the Pagets, Paulets, and Cavendishes were as stout for the King as any old feudal house in the land. The defence of Basing House, the home of the Paulets, against Oliver Cromwell, by its master the Catholic Marquis of Winchester, became a legend. Of William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, Clarendon says that "he loved monarchy, as it was the foundation and support of his own greatness; and the Church, as it was well constituted for the splendour and security of the Crown; and religion, as it cherished and maintained that order and obedience that was necessary to both."¹ To him Thomas Hobbes dedicated his earliest treatise in defence of absolute monarchy.² The greater part of the landed interest shared this attitude. "There were not left a fifth part of the House of Peers at Westminster"; and they, "three or four men excepted," wished peace, "but had no power to compass it."³ The Commons were supported by London, most of the large towns, and the yeomen and tradesmen. In the eastern counties their strength was overwhelming. Even in the west and north the textile industries of Somerset and the West Riding formed Puritan patches in districts for the most part royalist. The farmers and tradesmen of East Anglia, whose fathers had been the vanguard of the Reformation and had defied the

¹ Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, VIII, 82.

² *Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policy*, written in 1640, but not published till 1650.

³ Clarendon, *ibid.*, V, 333; VIII, 187.

cruel persecutions of Mary and Elizabeth, provided Cromwell with the nucleus of the "New Model" army which decided the issue of the war.

The Parliamentary majority, and the yeomen and petty tradesmen who fought their battles, differed widely as to the order in Church and State which should replace the fallen autocracy. The Solemn League and Covenant signed in 1643 between Parliament and the Scots General Assembly pledged both nations to co-operate in a thorough reformation of religion "according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches." By the example of the best reformed churches the Scottish Covenanters meant their own. They intended that in England, as in Scotland, the government of the Church should be Presbyterian and its standard of orthodoxy that of Calvin and Knox. This was agreeable to the solid city merchants who financed the Parliamentary cause, and who anticipated that if England became Presbyterian they and their friends would be elected elders and run the Church as they liked. They had no fear of ecclesiastical tyranny, provided that they themselves were the tyrants. It was not so agreeable to the Puritan rank and file, who for a hundred years had been learning to think for themselves on the limited data at their disposal. Some of them were Independents, holding by the right of each congregation to worship as it pleased without answering to any superior authority. Some went further, and were Anabaptists or Socinians (a Socinian, it was said, was only a learned Baptist). Some, like Henry Marten in Parliament and John Wildman and Algernon Sidney in the Army (the "heathen," as Cromwell called them), were indifferent to all Churches and were in fact Deists. It is worth noting that, though the Roundhead party was not Rationalist, such Rationalists as then existed in England, except only Hobbes, were Roundheads. All these men, whom historians

loosely lump together as "Independents," agreed in denying the right of any earthly authority to prescribe their opinions and in objecting to the payment of tithes for the support of any established Church whatever. With John Milton they held that "New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large."¹

While victory was in the balance, the Roundheads had to close their ranks; but after Naseby the rift widened. The chief leaders in Parliament, backed by the London merchants and the Scots, demanded the establishment and enforcement of Presbyterianism. The power of the pulpit would thus, from their point of view, be in safe keeping. Laud's policy was applied in reverse: about two thousand clergy were deprived, and Puritans put in their place. But the men who had fought the war had other views. On the same day on which Charles surrendered to the Scots at Newark, a petition signed by two thousand people in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire was presented to the House of Commons for the abolition of tithes. It found no supporter. Those, it was said, who wanted to be quit of tithes would soon want to be quit of rent. Richard Baxter, who was a chaplain in the New Model for about eighteen months, was shocked to find himself among men who demanded political and religious equality, and who "*per fas aut nefas*, by law or without it, . . . were resolved to take down, not only bishops, and liturgy, and ceremonies, but all that did withstand their way."² Soon afterwards, in 1647, a petition was presented to the Commons demanding, among other democratic reforms, liberty of conscience, abolition of tithes, and payment of ministers of religion by voluntary contributions. The House ordered it to be burnt by the common hangman and imprisoned two of the peti-

¹ Milton, *On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*.

² *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, cited by Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, Chap. XXXV.

tioners. These demands became merged in the Army agitation for arrears of pay and other concessions, and culminated in the Leveller movement, which for many months frightened Parliament out of its wits and shook the authority of Cromwell himself.

It is notable that in this struggle the more extreme party in politics was the more tolerant in religion. Moderate Parliamentarians like Pym, Hampden, and Holles—the men whom Whig historians delight to honour—never entertained the idea of toleration at all. Religious uniformity seemed as necessary to them as it did to Charles or Laud. They differed from them only as to the kind of religion to be imposed. Cromwell and Ireton, though Parliament men, knew something of the temper of the troops who fought under them, and tried to mediate between Parliament and the Army. In the *Heads of the Proposals*, which they drew up and presented to Charles, they suggested, along with such measures as Parliamentary reform and a redistribution of seats, that there should be absolute religious liberty for all except Catholics, and that even Catholics should be unmolested on taking an oath of allegiance—an unusually liberal proposal for those days. The programme of the Levellers, the famous *Agreement of the People* drawn up by Lilburne and Wildman, was more radical still. In addition to manhood suffrage, equal electoral divisions, and the abolition of the king's and Lords' vetoes it demanded unlimited religious liberty as a "native right" inviolable even by Parliament, and made no exception in the case of Catholics. Government was to have no authority at all in matters of religion. The sole supporter of this programme in Parliament was Marten, who united a complete indifference to all religions with a plucky advocacy of toleration for all. Needless to say, Catholic historians like Belloc have little or nothing to say of the Levellers. To give any credit to such men as Marten and Lilburne would spoil the

Catholic fairy-tale about the liberty-loving Stuarts and the rich men's rebellion.

Cromwell and Ireton's rejection of the Leveller programme, and their subsequent forcible suppression of the movement, destroyed for a generation the possibility of achieving any measure of religious toleration in England. The Levellers were the only link which existed between the Puritan leaders and the masses. They were a link not to be despised. Thousands followed the funeral of Robert Lockyer, a young trooper shot for mutiny in London in 1649. Lilburne's acquittal by a London jury in the same year was greeted by wild demonstrations of joy in the crowded court. In 1653, when he was again tried for his life, four regiments were ordered to London to prevent a rescue, and his second acquittal was received with acclamations audible a mile away. The movement had deep popular roots. When it was broken, the common people had nothing more to hope from the Revolution. Cromwell turned his back on the peasants and mechanics who had followed him to victory at Marston Moor and Naseby, and in doing so condemned himself to govern by naked dictation. Many who had taken the field for liberty of conscience in the end gave up the struggle, as did Lilburne himself, and joined George Fox in his new Society of Friends, who, in reliance on their "inner light," rejected with equal emphasis both tyranny and the bearing of arms against it.

For three hundred years the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England have venerated Charles I as the "royal martyr." Even sober historians like Creighton can repeat the legend that Charles died for the cause of episcopacy. Charles undoubtedly held strong views on the subject. Those views were not disinterested. Like his father, he saw in the bench of bishops an indispensable support of the crown. "People," he wrote in 1646, "are governed by pulpits

more than the sword in times of peace. Religion is the only firm foundation of all power; . . . for when was there ever obedience where religion did not teach it?"¹ He intended that the Church of England should teach obedience to the king of England, and therefore wished it to be governed by his own nominees. He was nevertheless prepared, as a disagreeable necessity, to establish Presbyterianism for three years if by so doing he could induce the Scots to restore him to his throne by force. So much for his unswerving devotion to the principle of episcopacy.

It is untrue that Charles was forced to choose between martyrdom and apostacy from his Church. It was open to him to accept the proposals put before him in 1647 by Cromwell and Ireton. Under these he would have remained king and would have been free to practise his own religion on condition that his subjects (other than Catholics who refused to take an oath of allegiance) enjoyed a like toleration. Charles, however, did not intend to part with his power to persecute. He temporized with Cromwell and Ireton, played them false by intriguing with the Scots behind their backs, gambled on a new civil war, lost, and found himself at the mercy of the men whom he had tricked. He died, not for his religion, but for his right to enforce it on other men. Anglo-Catholics must be hard up for martyrs to canonize this king of shreds and patches.

The English Revolution was shipwrecked in 1649, not by the execution of Charles, who richly deserved his fate, but by the suppression of the Levellers and by the writing of one more wretched chapter in the history of England and Ireland in letters of blood and tears. The two tragedies were related. One cause of the agitation in the Army was the intention of Parliament to send the troops to Ireland. The English Levellers were not interested in the reconquest of

¹ Cited by Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*.

Ireland for the benefit of Parliamentary creditors and adventurers on the make. That was one reason why they were suppressed. The best that can be said for Cromwell is that he was as tolerant as the narrow basis of his power and his fear of opposition would allow. His deeds of horror in Ireland had a political rather than a religious motive. Similar motives made him refuse toleration to the Anglican service or the Mass. Otherwise he was willing to live and let live provided that his Government was not endangered. The Established Church was kept up, and its livings filled with men who could be warranted not to use the Prayer Book or trouble the Government in any way—an arrangement naturally unpopular with the ejected clergy and with those who wanted no established Church at all. In order to augment his financial resources Cromwell wisely allowed the Jews to settle in England. The persecution of the Quakers (including the bad case of James Nayler, who for crazily riding naked into Bristol was pilloried, bored through the tongue, branded on the forehead, whipped through the streets, and imprisoned with hard labour for two years) was due to the cruel zeal of Cromwell's mainly Presbyterian Parliament rather than to the inclination of the Protector himself. His breach with the Levellers doomed him to depend on the support of the right wing of his party. After his death they naturally took the first opportunity of restoring Charles II on terms agreeable to themselves, while the people as naturally declined to lift a finger for a régime which had done nothing for them. Even the soldiers refused to fight for a Commonwealth from which the life had departed, and allowed themselves to be disbanded without a struggle. Whatever protector, general, or king ruled England, *their* cause—the cause of liberty of conscience and the birthright of Englishmen—had been betrayed and lost years before.

The most hopeful event of the revolutionary period

was one little regarded by the chief actors in the drama. A small group of men calling themselves the "Invisible College" took in hand the promotion of experimental science in England. John Evelyn the Royalist, William Petty the Parliamentarian, Robert Boyle the aristocrat, and Christopher Wren the clergyman's son met to discuss, not the merits of episcopacy and Presbyterianism, or the dogmas of predestination and free will, but the improvement of agriculture and industry and the application to that end of the discoveries of Galileo, Descartes, and Torricelli. After the Restoration the group attracted the notice of Charles II, and in 1662 was incorporated as the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge. But Charles was not its founder.

The controversies of Commonwealth days promoted free discussion in wider circles than the Royal Society, and carried a step further that questioning of authority which the Reformation had begun. During the early meetings of the Invisible College, Gerrard Winstanley, a man unknown to its members save as an obscure Leveller whose digging and sowing of common land had given some trouble to the Council of State, was writing his *Law of Freedom*. Along with ideas of planned production far in advance of the time, he advocated universal education and the virtual substitution of science for religion. "The priest is to confine himself to what he has learned from study and observation. For to know the secrets of Nature is to know the works of God, and to know the works of God is to know God himself."¹

¹ G. P. Gooch, *English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century*, Chap. VII.

CHAPTER XIII

TOWARDS TOLERATION

THE English Republic fell, not by the valour of its enemies, but by the treachery of men who had made their fortunes in its service. The chief promoters of the Restoration were not Cavaliers, but men who, like George Monk and Edward Montagu, had been trusted officers and personal friends of Cromwell, or at the very least, like Anthony Ashley Cooper and George Downing, had served in Puritan armies and sat in Puritan Parliaments. Such men, in restoring the monarchy, did not intend to restore the system of Charles I and Laud. In fact it was never restored in its entirety, and the attempt to do so soon involved the Stuarts in final shipwreck.

It was inevitable that the attempt would be made. Charles II had discovered by experience in Scotland that Presbyterianism was "no religion for gentlemen." He had spent the greater part of his exile at the Catholic Courts of Paris, Cologne, and Brussels. Both he and his brother James had come to the conclusion that the Catholic Church, which discouraged men from thinking for themselves, was safer for monarchs than the Protestantism which had brought forth the Long Parliament and Cromwell; and though neither prince had yet declared himself a convert, both hoped to use the royal prerogative to secure first toleration and then domination for the Church of their choice. The generality of Cavaliers did not look so far ahead. But they had eighteen bitter years of defeat, humiliation, and impoverishment to avenge, and, on securing a Parliamentary majority in 1661, at once resolved to make hay while the sun shone.

Some things could not be altered. The Star Chamber, for example, though a committee of the House of Lords reported in favour of its revival, was gone beyond recall. But the bishops were restored to their former power and dignity; and to preclude the possibility of a Puritan majority in any future House of Commons, the Corporation Act obliged all members of borough corporations (who returned the majority of members) to receive the sacrament in church, renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and abjure the use of force against the King in any circumstances. It was a futile Act which said little for the political foresight of its sponsors. The most dangerous enemies of Church and King were not scrupulous Puritans who would boggle at the barrier, but Deists who, rightly refusing to be kept out of politics by a test devised by their opponents, would despise it and take it. The Act of Uniformity, passed in 1662, revised the Prayer Book in various ways which exalted the priestly office, and made the use of the revised book, together with a declaration of non-resistance to the sovereign, compulsory on all incumbents. About two thousand clergy were ejected on August 24 ("Black Bartholomew") for refusing to use the amended book or to abjure resistance to the King. An abortive rising in 1663, in the West Riding of Yorkshire (a Puritan stronghold), was made the pretext for passing the Conventicle Act of 1664, which prohibited on pain of fine and imprisonment, and of transportation for a third offence, all meetings for religious worship not sanctioned by the Act of Uniformity. The Five Mile Act of 1665 further forbade Nonconformist clergy to come within five miles of a corporate town. The pendulum of persecution thus swung once more in the Laudian direction. As before, the motives of the persecutors were as much political as religious. The net effect, however, was to alienate large sections of the middle class from the Established Church and to

deprive her for all time of any but a legal title to be called national.

In Scotland, too, Laud's policy was revived. The mistake of trying to enforce the use of the English Prayer Book was not repeated; but Presbyterianism was abolished, episcopacy restored, three or four hundred clergy ejected from their livings, and conventicles suppressed by force. The generally backward state of Scotland, as compared with England, was responsible for the greater ferocity of the conflict in the northern kingdom. Torture was still legal there and, in the form of the "boot," was freely used to extract information from people objectionable to the Government, while the Covenanters inevitably resorted to armed force to protect their banned meetings from interference. The result was a long, savage struggle between terrorism on one side and dour fanaticism on the other, and a corresponding difficulty in achieving any sort of toleration after a warfare so fertile in evil memories.

For Charles and his brother James the restoration of episcopacy in England and Scotland was only a stepping-stone towards the Romanization of both countries. In furthering this design they counted on the support of their cousin, Louis XIV of France. By the secret treaty of Dover, signed in 1670 between Charles and Louis, the English king was to declare himself a Catholic and ally England with France in return for French money and French troops. But the manœuvre was badly timed. The enthusiasm of the middle classes for the Restoration had cooled off rapidly in face of religious persecution, the profligate extravagance of the court, the new taxation which it entailed, and the disastrous Dutch war. The Cavalier majority in Parliament had begun to crumble. "No courtier!" and "No court pimp!" had become slogans at by-elections.¹ Finally the repudiation, in

¹ Pepys' *Diary*, October 21, 1666. Pepys is a frequent and valuable

1672, of Charles's debts in the City threw the moneyed classes, who twelve years before had unanimously recalled him to the throne, into equally unanimous opposition. Frightened out of his original intention of declaring himself a Catholic, he tried to divide his opponents by playing off Nonconformists against Anglicans. He issued a Declaration of Indulgence, suspending all penal laws against both Catholics and Nonconformists, and temporarily relaxed the persecution of Scottish Presbyterians. He did not thereby win the English Nonconformists or the Scottish Covenanters, but he exasperated the Anglicans. In 1673 Parliament forced him to withdraw the Declaration and passed the Test Act, which obliged all public servants, civil or military, to receive the sacrament in the Church of England and to renounce the Mass as superstitious. This forced James, who had already declared himself a Catholic, to resign his office of Lord High Admiral and imposed a temporary retreat on Charles.

It was now evident that Charles would leave no legitimate issue, and that on his death the crown would descend to James—an open Catholic, as absolutist in inclination as his brother, and far more honest and unswerving in pursuit of his aims. The later events of the reign centred round the attempt of the Parliamentary opposition, led by Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, an old Cromwellian, to exclude James from the succession. Shaftesbury was able and unscrupulous. He turned his coat three times in all—too often for his reputation. But he was not venal. The man who for many troubled years retained the confidential services and intimate friendship of John Locke cannot have been wholly a scoundrel. He was a masterly political organizer. The Green Ribbon Club, by means of which he mobilized opinion

(because unwilling) witness to the speedy disillusionment of the middle class with the restored monarchy.

against the court, anticipated the Jacobin Club of the French Revolution and the party caucuses of later days. He fought consistently for greater religious toleration and opposed the repressive Acts of the Cavalier Parliament, his main argument for toleration being based on the advantage to trade. He himself was a Deist, if not an Atheist. "All sensible men," he is reported to have said, "are of the same religion," and being asked what that was, to have replied: "No sensible man tells." He excepted from his plan of toleration, and presumably from the category of sensible men, Catholics on the one hand and Fifth Monarchy men (artisan sectaries who had troubled the Governments both of Cromwell and of Charles II) on the other.

Behind Shaftesbury, in what was at first called the "country party" and later the Whig party, were aligned all those middle-class interests which a generation before had rallied to the Long Parliament against Charles I—the city of London and the mercantile and manufacturing classes in general, all "heartily for the Protestant religion and for the interest of England" against papal aggression and French competition.¹ On the same side were now ranged unequivocally the great Reformation families—the Russells, the Cavendishes, and their like—who, however fond they might be of monarchy, saw with alarm their abbey lands going to re-endow religious orders under a popish sovereign. Against them, in the "court" or, as it came to be called, the Tory party, were arrayed most of those classes which had supported Charles I in the Civil War—the bulk of the squirearchy, the Anglican clergy, and those great trading monopolists who looked to the royal prerogative to protect their charters and preferred even a Catholic king to the risks of revolution.

For the time being the Whigs ruined their cause by

¹ Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, Book III.

associating themselves with the lies of Titus Oates about a "popish plot" to assassinate the King. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that there *was* a popish plot of long standing and very dangerous, with Charles II at its head, the object of which was the reconversion of Britain to Catholicism by Governmental pressure and with French assistance. Only recently Father Coleman, a priest in James's household, had written to the French Court for money to be used in bribing members of Parliament with a view to "the utter subduing of a pestilent heresy, which has so long domineered over a great part of the northern world." Coleman's papers were seized and used to support Oates's story. Charles, who had the best of all reasons for disbelieving in a Catholic plot against himself, cynically gave rope to the scaremongers, the better to conceal his real rôle. Then, having successfully discredited the Whigs, he struck back. Parliament was dissolved. Borough charters were forfeited and corporations filled up with royal nominees. Shaftesbury fled to Holland, and his party was broken up by the prosecution for treason of its leading notables. James was restored to his office in spite of the Test Act. No such bid for royal absolutism had been made since the days of Strafford and Laud. Finally, on his deathbed, Charles dropped the mask. Anglican bishops, who for a quarter of a century had preached passive obedience to the Lord's anointed, found themselves shut out of the royal death-chamber, while Father Huddleston was smuggled up the backstairs to bring the monarch, no longer merry, the last sacrament and the needed absolution for his many compliances with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The squires and parsons had supported Charles II in most things, and were prepared to support James II in many. They rallied to him against the unstable Monmouth's attempt to raise the west, and turned no hair when Judge Jeffreys hanged or transported

hundreds of Somerset peasants, artisans and miners who had turned out to fight for the "Protestant duke."

But it was not long before even Anglicans found that their loyalty had limits. In the very year of James's accession his cousin and ally, Louis XIV, revoked the Edict of Nantes and started a persecution which drove nearly half a million French Protestants into exile. Thousands of refugees settled in England, bringing their industries with them, and inflamed opinion against Louis. The sufferings of the Huguenots fired comfortable English Churchmen, outside the narrow circle of sycophantic courtiers who surrounded James, with just that spark of righteous indignation which so often converts material interest into moral conviction. With this example of Catholic absolutism visible to all eyes, James's attempt to open the public services and the universities to Catholics by autocratically overriding the Test Act was doomed to catastrophic failure.

Apologists of the Stuarts are fond of maintaining that James lost his throne in the cause of toleration. The issue of a Declaration of Indulgence dispensing with penal laws against Catholics and Nonconformists alike might, if it had stood alone, be considered to support that contention. But it did not stand alone. James was not a convincing exponent of liberty of conscience. The Church to which he belonged had never in all her history, and has never to this day, admitted the right of private judgment in faith or morals. He himself, as royal commissioner for Scotland under his brother, had severely persecuted the Covenanters, and as king he used his prerogative to deprive or suspend clergy who preached against Catholicism. There is no reason to suppose that, if once he had succeeded in packing the Army, the public services, and the universities with Catholics, he would have continued to talk toleration. The Huguenot

exiles were there to witness what Catholic monarchs could do. The Declaration of Indulgence did not deceive Englishmen of that day; neither need it deceive historians of this.

In 1688 James ordered the clergy to read the Declaration in their churches. It was an awkward situation for the Church of England. Since the Reformation the chief political function of that body had been to tune the pulpits in the interest of the monarchy, which in the main had coincided with that of the great property-owners. Now these two interests were at variance. The propertied classes were alarmed by the threat to undo the Reformation settlement. Even the King's assurance that he would leave the holders of abbey lands in possession of their estates did not allay their suspicions. Forced to choose between king and squirearchy, the Church, without hesitation, took her stand with the big battalions. Archbishop Sancroft and six bishops petitioned that the clergy might be relieved from the duty of reading the Declaration. Charles II would have tactfully withdrawn the order. But James was not built that way. He sent the bishops to the Tower and prosecuted them for seditious libel. They were acquitted amid wild enthusiasm. James had worked a miracle: he had made the bench of bishops a popular institution for the first and perhaps the last time in its history. Even that did not serve to warn him of his danger.

Meanwhile the birth of a Prince of Wales decided the politicians to act. Even those who had supported the succession of James recoiled from the prospect of yet another Catholic monarch. William of Orange, Stadtholder of the Netherlands and husband of James's daughter Mary, had for some time been trying to bring England into his continental coalition against Louis. James stood in his way. Seven political leaders, among them representatives of the Cavendish and Russell families, now jointly invited William to come

to the rescue of the liberties of England. After a few months of preparation he landed in the west. The Bishop and Dean of Exeter fled, and the clergy shook in their shoes. But the people welcomed William in great numbers, and the gentry, as soon as they were satisfied that he was not a Cromwell or a Monmouth, began to join him. James strove to save himself by last-minute concessions, restoring the forfeited borough charters and promising to call a Parliament, but in vain. His army deserted him, and he fled to France.

The Revolution was practically bloodless; for no one apart from a weak minority of Catholic backwoodsmen had any desire to fight for James. Churchmen, faced with the visible collapse of government by divine right, salved their consciences with the fiction that James had voluntarily abdicated by his flight. In the Parliament convened in 1689 the Crown was offered to William and Mary conditionally on their assent to a constitutional declaration subsequently embodied in the Bill of Rights. This document, besides declaring illegal the suspension of Acts of Parliament and various other autocratic measures to which the Stuarts had resorted, debarred any Catholic, or person married to a Catholic, from thenceforth occupying the throne of England. At the price of a few hardly more than verbal concessions to the theory of hereditary right the Whigs gained substantially all for which they had contended ten years before.

The same year witnessed the abolition of the Anglican monopoly in religion. The Toleration Act granted freedom of worship to Protestant Nonconformists. It maintained the penal laws against Catholics and against all who preached or wrote against the Trinity. The Blasphemy Act, passed a few years later, imposed penalties for denying the truth of Christianity or the divine authority of the Bible. This Act, which did little but reaffirm the common law on the subject, was indicative rather of the growth of the

opinions against which it was directed than of any new access of orthodoxy in high quarters. The proliferation of sects under the Commonwealth, the reaction of the wealthier classes against Puritanism, and the work of the Royal Society all combined to promote the disintegration of dogma. Deism was in the air and, so long as it was confined to the upper ranks of society and did not threaten to unsettle the masses, was safe from the interference of the law.

About four hundred clergy, including Sancroft and seven other bishops, refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary, and in 1690 were deprived of their sees or their livings. The sole effect of their action was to create a new denomination of Nonjurors, who, calling themselves the true Church of England, continued as a religious curiosity down to the nineteenth century. The rest of the Anglican clergy declined to quarrel with their bread and butter and accepted the new Parliamentary king and queen.

The Revolution in Scotland was a more violent affair. On the landing of William, the Covenanters took their revenge for the persecutions of the last two reigns by wrecking Holyrood chapel and ejecting Episcopalian clergy from their livings. An attempt by John Graham of Claverhouse, who had been a chief instrument of repression under Charles and James, to raise the Highlands against William ended with his death at Killiecrankie. In 1690 Presbyterianism was re-established and the General Assembly met again, but the power of the Kirk to inflict civil penalties was abolished. Toleration, however, was less easy to achieve in Scotland than in England. Memories of the dragooning of the south-west, the torture of the boot, and "bluidy Clavers" were too raw and recent. Scottish Episcopalians were usually also Jacobites, and had to wait till after the Act of Union for a freedom of worship similar to that accorded to English Nonconformists. As it was, a minority of militant

and uncompromising yeomen and farmers of the south-west, known as Cameronians, separated themselves from a Kirk which in their eyes had sinfully submitted to an uncovenanted king, and by their secession promoted the cause of freedom better than they knew. The Presbyterians were no longer a homogeneous body. They had their moderates and their extremists, their established Kirk and their dissenters; and their divisions served to abate the danger of ecclesiastical tyranny.

In Ireland alone the Revolution was doomed to work only evil. Anglo-Irish relations had long since been hopelessly bedevilled by the cruelties and confiscations of Elizabeth's and Cromwell's days. English Whigs felt for the Irish, who had perversely remained Papist when England became Protestant, a contempt analogous to that which French Jacobins a century later were to feel for the priest-ridden peasants of La Vendée—a contempt expressed in Thomas Wharton's doggerel rhyme *Lillibullero*, by which he claimed to have "sung a king out of three kingdoms." It was inevitable that James, with French help, should try to use Ireland as a base of operations for the recovery of Great Britain, and that the Irish should rally to a Catholic king who promised to undo the work of Elizabeth and Cromwell. England was forced to undertake one more reconquest of Ireland. The Protestant "garrison," the descendants of Elizabethan and Cromwellian adventurers, rallied as one man to William, and in the hour of victory took such measures as they believed would make Ireland safe for themselves. More than a million acres of land were confiscated from Irish Catholics and sold to the highest bidder, and steps were taken to wrest the remainder from them by penal laws which deprived them of the ordinary rights of inheritance. Treated as helots in their own country, young Irishmen emigrated by thousands to seek service in the armies of England's

enemies, while those who remained sank deeper and deeper into poverty, ignorance, and superstition. With the best intentions, and in the name of enlightenment, the seventeenth century tied a knot for the twentieth to unravel in blood and tears.

CHAPTER XIV

AGE OF REASON, LIMITED

WITH the Revolution, the cause of Catholic reaction, and of absolute monarchy, which had become associated with it, was finally lost in England. Jacobites were numerous among the old Catholic families, and especially in the north, but were too weak to be really dangerous. Tories and Whigs had combined to bring in William, and they combined again in 1701 to secure the Protestant succession to the crown by the Act of Settlement. The danger of Jacobite reaction in Scotland was averted by the Act of Union, passed in 1707 in the teeth of violent opposition from a majority of the Scottish people, but with the goodwill of the General Assembly, since the Kirk was safeguarded, and of the moneyed interest, since Scottish traders gained equal rights with English.

The squires and parsons made one attempt to put the clock back in the last years of Anne, when reaction against the war policy of Marlborough and Godolphin brought the Tories back to power. Since the Revolution many Nonconformists had evaded the Test and Corporation Acts (which were intended to keep them out of politics) by communicating in church in order to qualify for office and then reverting to chapel-going. The Occasional Conformity Act of 1711 prescribed penalties for so doing. The Schism Act of 1714 forbade Nonconformists to keep schools or give tuition except "so far as relates to navigation or any mechanical art." The leading spirit in this policy of pinpricks was himself a Deist—Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, patron of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope and author of the notorious "taxes on know-

ledge.”¹ But the comedy of Bolingbroke posing as the champion of the Church was soon played out. Even he, when it came to the point, shrank from the decisive step of setting aside the Protestant succession, defying the whole army of public creditors who had sprung up under William and Anne, and precipitating civil war. When Anne died, he allowed George I to succeed without opposition, and was promptly dismissed to make room for ministers who could be better trusted to keep the Stuarts at a distance. The Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts were repealed in 1719. The thornier question of the Test and Corporation Acts was allowed to sleep, but Acts of Indemnity were regularly passed thenceforward to protect Nonconformists from penalties incurred by their contravention.

Meanwhile the Church of England slid into a comfortable coma. The throne was filled by a German prince, gross, uncultivated, and ignorant even of the English language. What remained of the royal prerogative, including the nomination of bishops, deans, and Regius professors, was delegated to such ministers as Sir Robert Walpole—landed men with trading connections, averse from revolutionary courses, careful not to exasperate the squires and parsons, but sceptical to the core of any doctrine which had not passed the test of reason. Bishopricks were filled by such men as Benjamin Hoadly, whose rejection of the divine authority of the Church and any test of orthodoxy would have led to his censure by Convocation if that body had not been prorogued indefinitely; George Berkeley, whose use of the sceptical weapon against the sceptics left the next word in philosophy to David Hume; and Joseph Butler, whose appeal to probability, “the guide of life,” against Deism, though

¹ In 1712, in order to strike at journalism and pamphleteering, a stamp duty was imposed on newspapers and a tax on all paper except that used for learned works. The paper duties were not finally repealed till 1861.

intended as a defence of revealed religion, in effect left Atheism in a stronger position than before. To Voltaire, imprisoned, exiled, and beaten in his own country for attacks on its autocratic rulers and insolent nobles, England seemed in comparison a Utopia of freedom and toleration.

That was one side of the medal. Against it had to be set the fact that eighteenth-century prosperity rested on ruthless exploitation of the common people and of subject races. The application of science to industry and agriculture, which began in this century, was indispensable to economic progress. But its immediate price was the passage of Enclosure Acts which converted many thousands of yeomen into landless labourers or paupers, and the ruin of domestic industry by the advent of industrial capitalism. Here and there men violently resisted these new developments and paid for their temerity under a ferocious criminal code which punished no less than two hundred different kinds of offence with death. Meanwhile Bristol and Liverpool merchants made fortunes out of the African slave trade, which shipped twenty thousand Negroes a year across the Atlantic for sale to American or West Indian planters, and against which (apart from isolated individuals) no Christian denomination, except the Society of Friends, as yet made any protest.

"The harmless Natives basely they trapan,
And barter Baubles for the *Souls of Men*;
The Wretches they to Christian Climes bring o'er,
To serve worse Heathens than they did before . . .
To more than *Spanish* Cruelty inclin'd,
Torment the Body, and debauch the Mind:
The ling'ring Life of Slavery preserve,
And vilely teach them both to Sin and serve.
In vain they talk to them of Shades below,
They fear no Hell *but where such Christians go*." ¹

For the propertyless proletariat at home the Church of England was impotent to provide an opium of

¹ Daniel Defoe, *The Reformation of Manners*.

sufficient strength. In 1738 John Wesley and George Whitefield began their campaign of evangelism among Somerset colliers, Newgate prisoners, and other sections of society for which the Berkeleys and Butlers did not cater. Wesley, Whitefield, and their followers preached a gospel of individual salvation or damnation based on the letter of the Bible and inducing, in their unsophisticated congregations, groans, cries, and other manifestations of frenzied excitement which educated people found very repulsive. To Butler, when Bishop of Bristol, Wesley's claim to be directed by the Holy Spirit seemed "a horrid thing, sir, a very horrid thing." Methodist preachers found themselves barred from the pulpits and slowly but surely forced out of the Church of England. Yet a time was coming when the wealthy would be only too glad of a religious revival which diverted the hopes and fears of the poor from this world to the next, and when shrewd foreign observers would declare that Methodism had saved England from revolution.

As to the slave trade, the complacency of the interested parties was troubled by only one doubt. The impression prevailed in South Carolina that a Christian could not remain a slave and that baptism involved automatic manumission. There was therefore a certain reluctance to allow the instruction of slaves in the Christian faith. The Church of England, though no hand at evangelizing the poor, was still second to none in solving the dilemmas of the rich. Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, fortified by the opinion of St. Paul, satisfied his countrymen that a Christian Negro was still the property of his master, and enabled them with a serene conscience to serve both God and Mammon.

So far the benefits of the Toleration Act had not been extended to Catholics. The presence of a Catholic Pretender "over the water," and the actual Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745, in which many Catholics

participated, served to perpetuate the feeling that Catholics were a foreign body in the State and a potential "fifth column" in the service of a national enemy. After the accession of George III these factors gradually ceased to operate. The new generation of Englishmen had never known a Stuart sovereign. Tory squires and parsons, whose fathers had toasted the "king over the water," were willing to support the reigning monarch if he would accept their services. "Farmer George" was more than ready to meet half-way the country gentlemen of whom he felt himself the natural head. The Industrial Revolution was beginning. Strikes, food riots, demonstrations in support of "Wilkes and liberty," and the revolt of the American colonies caused more alarm to George III and his advisers than the remote menace of a Church whose only fault, from their point of view, was her excessive emphasis on the principle of authority. In 1778 an Act was passed to relieve Catholics, provided that they abjured the Pretender and denied the civil authority of the Pope, from all disabilities except those of exclusion from Parliament and from office. Politicians of all shades of opinion acquiesced in the abrogation of these relics of the past. But in 1780 an eccentric Scottish nobleman, Lord George Gordon, managed to persuade the London populace that their troubles (of which they had plenty) were due to the toleration of Popery, and to convulse the capital for several days by the Gordon Riots. It is characteristic of the time that while hundreds of Gordon's dupes paid for their folly with their lives, he himself was acquitted.

The beginning of the Industrial Revolution coincided with the first organized attack on the African slave trade. Opposition to this traffic had hitherto been confined to the Society of Friends and to exceptional individuals outside it. Among the latter were men of various religions and of no religion. Of those

who are on record as having denounced the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Richard Baxter, William Warburton, John Dyer, John Wesley, Laurence Sterne, William Robertson, Beilby Porteus, and William Paley, were ministers of religion; Daniel Defoe a Nonconformist; Thomas Southerne and Samuel Johnson, High Churchmen; Richard Steele and Thomas Day, Low Churchmen; William Cowper a Calvinist; James Beattie a Presbyterian; James Thomson (of *The Seasons*) a pantheist; and Alexander Pope, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and Gilbert Wakefield, Deists.¹ If we take into consideration the strong inducements which led men to profess adhesion to some form of Christianity, or at least to conceal dissent from it, we shall rate at its true value the claim of the Churches to have initiated the anti-slavery movement. There was no organized movement against the slave trade until 1787, when Thomas Clarkson, a young Cambridge graduate, managed to interest William Wilberforce, William Pitt, and other public men in the matter. A committee formed for the abolition of the slave trade was liberally supported by midland manufacturers like Josiah Wedgwood, but violently opposed by the planter interest and the Liverpool merchants. These last, in 1788, forwarded a petition to Parliament representing that the suppression of the slave trade would involve many of them in little short of ruin.

The attitude of the majority to this question was in fact determined less by religious conviction than by

¹ It is difficult sometimes to draw the line between a Low Churchman and a Deist. Day, the author of *Sandford and Merton*, is said to have invited farm labourers to his house for religious instruction, and may pass as a Churchman. This did not prevent him from being an ardent admirer of the Deist Rousseau. Pope was bred a Catholic, but his *Essay on Man* (dedicated to Bolingbroke) is wholly Deistic. He received the sacraments on his death-bed, saying: "I do not suppose that it is essential, but it will look right." Wakefield was a professor at a Unitarian college, but left it owing to his objection to religious observances.

economic interest. So little could Christian professions be counted on as a guarantee of humanitarian sympathies that the outbreak of the French Revolution was sufficient to frighten most of the supporters of Church and King into the ranks of the slave-drivers and to postpone any action against the slave trade, let alone slavery itself, for many years. In spite of the much-quoted judgment which some years before had pronounced any slave setting foot in the British Isles to be free, Hannah More, as late as 1790, wrote to Horace Walpole that a fugitive Negro girl had been arrested and taken on board ship at Bristol. The first European power to put an end to the slave trade in her colonies was not Britain, but Denmark. The first colony in which slavery itself was terminated was not British, but the French colony of San Domingo, where the coloured population took matters into their own hands and ended it by insurrection.

CHAPTER XV

THE JACOBIN SPECTRE

WHEN allowance has been made for the differences in the previous history of the two countries, the French Revolution which began in 1789 had many similarities to the English Revolution which began in 1640. The differences are important. In England the Reformation had been victorious. In France it had been defeated. The expropriation of the swollen wealth of the religious orders, which had been achieved in England in the sixteenth century, had to wait in France until the eighteenth. Further, the autocracy which Laud and Strafford tried unsuccessfully to set up in England was actually established in France by Richelieu and Mazarin, and lasted more than a century after their deaths. Between the two Revolutions there accordingly elapsed over a century of economic and scientific development. Calvinism was outmoded and replaced as a revolutionary ideology by Deism or Materialism. By the time the States General met at Versailles the Industrial Revolution had begun in Britain and had spread to the principal French cities, filling them with a hungry proletariat very different from the London apprentices who had demonstrated against popery and prelacy under the Long Parliament.

But when this has been said, the fact remains that the later Revolution was the legitimate offspring of the earlier. Voltaire and Rousseau based their philosophy on John Locke. Like the English House of Commons, the French Third Estate profited by national bankruptcy to snatch political power from the court and aristocracy. As in England, the

threatened orders resisted and appealed to the arbitrament of war. As in England, revolution in the State was accompanied by schism in the Church, and clergy who opposed the new order were ousted from their benefices and replaced by others who accepted it. As in England, a king who could not keep faith with his people was deposed and sent to the scaffold. As in England, the Army, which saved the Revolution, was left master of the situation, and the upshot was a military dictatorship and an eventual restoration of the monarchy on a constitutional basis. As in England, the attempt of the restored monarchy to undo the Revolution was to lead to the final and ignominious exit from the scene of a dynasty which could neither learn nor forget.

The rulers of Britain, however, between 1789 and 1815 were concerned, not with historical analogies, but with the immediate danger to themselves. As men of property they saw in the uprising of the French people a menace to any social order based on gradations of rank and class. Conveniently forgetting the many family fortunes in their own country founded on the suppression of religious orders and confiscation of Church lands, they took fright at the measures of the French National Assembly and began to manifest an unwonted sympathy with Catholic priests and to discover unsuspected merits in the Middle Ages. Edmund Burke bewailed the passing of the age of chivalry and the succession of that of "sophisters, economists, and calculators." Horace Walpole, who had once hung in his house the death-warrant of Charles I with the inscription, *Major Charta*,¹ went into transports of indignation when the French did to their king exactly what he had applauded his English ancestors for doing to theirs. Only a tiny minority of the Whig party in Parliament kept a sense of proportion. Outside Parliament Thomas Paine, who

¹ "The greater Charter"—that is, greater than that of 1215.

had been the first man openly to advocate the independence of the United States of America, added to his services to mankind by trenchantly answering Burke in *The Rights of Man*, and by doing so incurred prosecution for treason, exile, outlawry, and a violent hatred which, fanned by *The Age of Reason*, was to pursue him far beyond the grave, and has not quite died down even to-day.

The French Revolution in fact frightened the wealthier classes out of the Deism which had been fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, and convinced them of the necessity of supernatural beliefs as a bulwark of social order. The doctrines of the total depravity of human nature and the supreme necessity of personal salvation, which had disgusted educated men when preached by Wesley and Whitefield, began to be respectable and even fashionable. Those who preached them were no longer driven out of the Church, but remained to form an important Evangelical party within it. In the last years of the century, when pauper children were being consigned to factories by the cartload, when prohibitive corn duties were doubling the price of food, and when hungry workers were petitioning for the regulation of wages and beginning to form illicit combinations, bankers like Henry Thornton, and directors of the East India Company like Charles Grant, found the Evangelical movement well worthy of support. William Wilberforce, who conjoined a lively sensibility to the sufferings of black slaves with a callous indifference to those of British workers, in his *Practical View of Real Christianity* told the latter that "their situation in life, with all its evils," was better than they had "deserved at the hand of God." Arthur Young turned his attention from agricultural reform to the peril of revolution, and advocated the building of more churches to inculcate "the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and

to submission to the higher powers.”¹ The Rev. Thomas Gisborne, deploring the “criminal habits” of Lancashire colliers and their “use of animal food three times a day,” recommended that they should be given, by education, “a just sense of revealed religion, and of the rewards and punishments of a future state.”² Hannah More, the friend of Walpole and Wilberforce and a leading light of the Evangelical party, in her cheap tracts drew the attention of working women to “the benefits flowing from the distinction of rank and fortune, which has enabled the high so liberally to assist the low,” and trusted that the poor would receive such assistance “as a matter of favour, not of right,” and would continue to hate the French and to revere God, the gentry, and the British constitution.³

Faced by the Jacobin spectre, such members of the ruling class as were capable of long-range calculation forgot their ancient feud with the Catholic Church. In 1800 Pitt proposed to accompany the Parliamentary union of Great Britain and Ireland with a measure of Catholic emancipation. The existing religious test for public officials and members of Parliament was to be replaced by a declaration against the sovereignty of the people; and the Catholic clergy in Ireland were to be endowed from public funds. Had this measure become law, the Irish priesthood would probably have been reconciled to British rule and a permanent wedge been driven between them and the Irish agrarian and republican movements. But Pitt encountered an immovable obstacle in the imbecile brain of George III and in the reluctance of the majority of his own supporters to share their jobs and sinecures with a new set of claimants. The governing class was divided against itself on the question of

¹ Young, *An Inquiry into the State of Mind amongst the Lower Classes*, cited by J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, Chap. XI.

² Cited by the Hammonds, *ibid.*

³ Cited by the Hammonds, *ibid.*

"the Catholic claims"; and the most conservative Church in the world was enabled to continue to pose as the friend of the Irish people by their common detestation of the tithe-drawing Protestant Establishment.

The development of industry, the democratic agitation in commercial and manufacturing towns of such bodies as the Corresponding Societies, and the wide circulation among the masses of the writings of Thomas Paine and William Cobbett, forced the Churches to take an interest in popular education. The initiative came from outside the Established Church. At the end of the eighteenth century Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, backed by the brewer Samuel Whitbread and other influential Whigs, began to give free elementary instruction to working-class children, confining his religious teaching to doctrines common to all Christian denominations. Soon afterwards Robert Owen, managing partner of the New Lanark cotton mills, set out to prove that a factory could be run with some regard to the interests of the adults and children employed in it, and in the course of doing so established admirable infant schools. Unlike Lancaster, Owen was an unbeliever in any form of religion and based his educational work on a thoroughgoing Determinism. Such undertakings were highly alarming to the Church. The clergy were more concerned that the masses should learn to order themselves lowly and reverently towards their betters than that they should acquire knowledge useful to them in this world. The Rev. Andrew Bell, the foremost Anglican educationalist of the time, was averse to teaching the lower classes even to read and write lest such instruction should "elevate above their station those who were doomed to the drudgery of daily labour." Even Lancaster's scheme was vehemently denounced as dangerous to the established order. Owen had as yet attained only local notoriety.

A bill introduced into Parliament by Whitbread in 1807 for establishing elementary schools at the cost of the rates and free from clerical control was foredoomed to rejection. Davies Giddy, though a man of scientific attainments, argued in the House of Commons that

“giving education to the labouring classes of the poor . . . would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them, and to furnish the executive magistrate with much more vigorous laws than were now in force.”¹

Moved by such “noodles’ orations” as this the House of Commons whittled down Whitbread’s bill from a compulsory to a merely permissive measure. The House of Lords went further, and on the motion of Lord Chancellor Eldon and Charles Manners-Sutton, Archbishop of Canterbury, rejected the bill outright.

But the need of some sort of popular education on lines acceptable to the powers that were was beginning to be felt. It was obvious, even from the point of view of the Church, that the field could not be left to the Lancasters and the Owens. To counter Lancaster,

¹ Cited *ibid.*, Chap. III.

Bell, with the support of Manners-Sutton and other influential people, founded in 1811 a body portentously named the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. The long purses were on the side of the Church; and the inoculation of working-class children against dangerous thoughts was at last in safe hands. In 1813 Owen visited London to seek legislative support for a plan of universal education, but was completely unsuccessful.

During the bitter years of the Napoleonic Wars, the accompanying and following trade slumps and social misery, the Luddite riots, and the later Radical agitation, the Church remained the obedient auxiliary policeman of the rich, cultured and purblind oligarchs, who in the name of a sightless, mindless old man, hidden in a padded room at Windsor, misgoverned England. Typical of the clergy of that time were the seven bishops who in 1810 voted, in the House of Lords, against Sir Samuel Romilly's bill to abolish the death penalty for shoplifting. It is worth noting that Romilly was a Deist. Manners-Sutton led his brethren into the lobby in defence of the atrocities of the penal code, as he had led them in opposition to popular education. Typical, too, was the Rev. Hammond Roberson of Liversedge, in the West Riding, who in 1812, when two rioters had been mortally wounded in an attack on a local mill, plied them with questions as to their accomplices. "Can you keep a secret?" gasped one of them at the point of death. "I can." "So can I," said the man, and died keeping it.¹ In 1813 Romilly brought in his bill again. The House of Lords again rejected it, five bishops voting to retain the death penalty for stealing

¹ Frank Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites*, cited by J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer*, Chap. XI. The Rev. Patrick Brontë assisted Roberson in putting down the frame-breakers. See David Wilson, *Emily Brontë: First of the Moderns*, in the *Modern Quarterly Miscellany*, No. 1, 1947.

5s. from a shop. As if to underline their decision, a boy of fourteen was hanged for theft at Newport in 1814. Well might the distressed weavers of Stockport, when it was proposed to ask the rector to call a meeting on their behalf, exclaim: "Damn the rector! We may wait for ever if we wait for him. He will order us soup!"¹

Methodist ministers were as zealous for the established order as those of the State Church. In 1811, following a strike of several weeks in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields (in which the stables of the Bishop of Durham were used as a gaol), a Methodist preacher at Jarrow fulminated against the miners' union, then illegal owing to the Combination Acts, as "unchristian and immoral." In 1819, the year of Peterloo, at the peak of the distress and unrest which followed the Napoleonic Wars, a conference of Methodist ministers at Bristol admonished those "to whom this measure of national suffering has been appointed" not to be led astray by "unreasonable and wicked men" from their "civil and religious duties."

"You are surrounded with persons to whom these duties are the object of contempt and ridicule: show your regard for them because they are the doctrines of your Saviour. Abhor those publications in which they are assailed, along with every other doctrine of your holy religion; and judge of the spirit and objects of those who would deceive you into political parties and associations, by the vices of their lives, and the infidel malignity of their words and writings. 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?'"²

Nevertheless the Methodist and other Nonconformist Churches, owing to their elective form of

¹ I. L. and B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer*, Chap. IV.

² *Ibid.*, *The Town Labourer*, Chap. XIII.

Church government, were more amenable to pressure from below than was the Establishment. For this reason the Government held strongly that whatever might be said for private enterprise in industry, docility in the masses was best guaranteed by a State religion. In 1818 Parliament was sufficiently frightened by the growth of Nonconformity, especially in Wales, to vote £1,000,000 for building churches. Another £500,000 was voted in 1824. Vilely as the bodies of the workers and their children were maltreated in the first fine careless rapture of industrial capitalism, their rulers were at least not negligent of their immortal souls.

CHAPTER XVI
LIBERAL PROGRESS AND CATHOLIC
REACTION

As the Napoleonic wars receded into the past, the anti-Jacobin fog gradually lifted. It was impossible that a country which was being rapidly industrialized should continue to be governed by men to whom the first political consideration was the maintenance of the ascendancy of the landed interest and the Established Church. In 1828 the battle was joined on the issue of religious tests as a condition of entry into public life. Lord John Russell, the rising hope of the Whig party, introduced and carried through the House of Commons a Bill for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The Duke of Wellington, though a Tory of the old school, advised the Lords to pass it; and, to the disgust of the old diehard Eldon, it went through. Nonconformists thus became legally eligible for Parliament and for office.

This was a preliminary skirmish to a greater battle on Catholic emancipation. - Thanks to the criminal blunders of successive British Governments, the Catholic Church had been enabled to pose as the champion of the impoverished Irish peasantry against the "Protestant garrison" of landlords and clergy to whom they paid (when unable to dodge it) rack-rents and tithes. In 1823 Daniel O'Connell and Richard Lalor Sheil founded the Catholic Association to further the Catholic claims. Its power was shown when in 1828 O'Connell, though disqualified by law, stood as Parliamentary candidate for Clare and was returned at the head of the poll by freeholders "led to the hustings by

the parish priest.”¹ It became clear that the Catholic Association would win a majority of Irish county seats whenever an election occurred. Wellington was faced with the alternatives of allowing Catholics to sit in Parliament or depriving Ireland of Parliamentary representation altogether and governing by naked force. He chose the former, and in 1829 introduced a Bill rendering Catholics eligible to sit in future Parliaments and to hold any public office except those of Regent, Lord Chancellor, or Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The Catholic Relief Act was carried by a large majority, but infuriated Wellington’s own party. The country parsons avenged themselves on the Government by ousting Peel from his seat for Oxford university. In Ireland the manner of giving detracted from the value of the gift. O’Connell was debarred from sitting until the next election; and Irish freeholders were punished by raising the voting qualification from 40s. to £10—a futile pinprick, since within three years the old franchises were swept away in both Great Britain and Ireland by the Reform Act of 1832.

Nowhere did the flowing tide of Liberalism awaken livelier alarm than in the High Church party. To the spiritual heirs of Laud and Sancroft the way the world had gone since the seventeenth century seemed wholly evil. The English, the American, and the French Revolutions, the overthrow of royal by Parliamentary authority, the toleration of dissent and infidelity, the admission of dissenters and infidels to the citadel of government itself, and the increasing influence in the State of the materially-minded middle and lower classes—all these were, in High Church eyes, so many signs of the onward march of Antichrist. It is true that industrial progress had its seamy side. England had become the workshop of the world at the price of an appalling exploitation of child labour in her mines and factories. Over large areas of the north and

¹ *Annual Register*, 1828.

midlands her "green and pleasant land" had given place to "dark Satanic mills" and their surrounding slag-heaps. But it was not these tangible evils which troubled High Churchmen. In 1830, when the agricultural labourers of the southern counties revolted against starvation wages, a Nonconformist or Methodist schoolmaster was sometimes found to speak for them. Otherwise it was left to Cobbett, the veteran Radical, and to Richard Carlile, repeatedly imprisoned for his Republican and Freethinking propaganda, to champion their cause. The clergy of Winchester Cathedral, when invited to sign a petition for the reprieve of the rioters under sentence of death, refused to do so "unless the grand jury and the magistracy of the county previously affixed their names."¹ In the event nine men, including boys of eighteen or nineteen, were hanged and 457 transported to the antipodes, where several "died almost immediately from disease, induced apparently by despair."² Carlile was tried at the Old Bailey for his manifesto in justification of the labourers and sentenced to a fine of £200 and two years' imprisonment. Cobbett was also brought to trial; but the jury disagreed.

Such things did not afflict the dignitaries of the Church. But when in 1833 the reformed Parliament suppressed two archbishoprics and eight bishoprics of the Established Church in Ireland, the reaction was instantaneous. John Keble, in the university pulpit at Oxford, stigmatized the policy of the Whig Government as "national apostasy." John Henry Newman, assisted by Keble, Pusey, and others, issued a series of *Tracts for the Times* in which war was declared on Liberalism and all its works in the name of a divinely commissioned, authoritarian, and infallible Church. That "rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories,"

¹ *The Times*, January 7, 1831, cited by J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer*, Chap. XII.

² Despatch from the Governor of Van Diemen's Land, 1834, cited *ibid.*

the young William Ewart Gladstone, whose maiden speech in the House of Commons had been a defence of the institution of slavery and an insistence on due compensation for its abolition, published in 1838 a work (satirically reviewed by Macaulay) in which he insisted on the duty of the State to maintain the Church, not as a political convenience, but as the vehicle of divine truth. From the age of reason the Tractarians appealed to the age of faith, from science to magic, from utility to antiquity.

The general body of the clergy were not prepared to accept this logic or to go tilting at windmills. They knew well enough who buttered their bread. From the Reformation onwards the Church of England, whatever theorists might say, had in fact been a political convenience. The attitude of the governing class to religion was exemplified in a letter which in 1840 the newly established Education Committee of the Privy Council addressed to Sir Thomas Phillips, a Welsh mineowner who had lately, as Mayor of Newport, been knighted by Queen Victoria for his services in the suppression of a Chartist riot :—

“My Lords conceive that the same motives which induce merchants and manufacturers to devote a portion of their annual profits to the insurance of the capital they employ in trade ought to be sufficient (even without any reference to moral considerations of much greater dignity and importance) to deter sagacious men from leaving their wealth exposed to the danger of popular tumults and secret violence, when a comparatively small annual expenditure, judiciously employed in introducing the elements of civilisation and religion, would render society harmonious and secure.”¹

¹ Cited by J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Age of the Chartists*, Chap. XI.

The considerations calculated to make a mine-owner support religious education could not have been better put. The Church was an auxiliary policeman and knew it. The annual report of the National Society for 1843, written after the Chartist strike of the year before, put the matter in a nutshell :—

“Wherever means of Church instruction were best provided, there the efforts of the disaffected were least successful. In whatever districts Church principles predominated, no outbreak took place, however grievous the privations of the people, except in cases where the rightly disposed inhabitants were overpowered by agitators from a distance.”¹

But a policeman takes his orders from the State, not vice versa. The Tractarian doctrine that the claims of the Church were prior to those of the State was a sheer inversion of nineteenth-century common sense. About 1839 Newman began to doubt whether the Church of England was in fact the branch of the one Catholic and Apostolic Church which he had supposed it to be. In 1841, Tract 90, in which he tried to maintain that the Catholic position was consistent with subscription to the Articles of the Church of England, proved too much for Oxford stomachs. The storm that ensued turned Newman's doubts to certainties; and in 1845 he, his disciple William George Ward, and many others, faced the logic of the situation and submitted to the Church of Rome. Thus, ironically enough, a movement which began as a protest against Liberal concessions to Catholics in Ireland ended as the most powerful recruiting agency for the Catholic Church in Britain which there had been since the Reformation.

¹ Cited *ibid.* A Chartist procession which petitioned Parliament in 1842 had inscribed on one of its banners the legend: “More Pigs and Less Parsons.” *Annual Register*, 1842.

In Scotland, too, the Established Church was finding difficulty in adapting itself to a changing world. Throughout the eighteenth century there had been tension between the "moderate" and "popular" parties in the Kirk. The "moderates," consisting of well-educated clergy open, at least in part, to the rationalizing influences of the age, clung to the State connection and to lay patronage as the only means of securing a foothold in the ministry to men of their outlook. The "popular" party held to the old Calvinist principle of election of ministers by the congregation, and from time to time carried their protest to the length of seceding to form separate denominations such as the Reformed Presbyterians (the old "Cameronians"), the Secession Church, the Relief Church, and so forth. These conflicts came to a head in 1838, when the Veto Act, by which the General Assembly had reaffirmed the right of parishioners to reject a minister nominated by the patron, was set aside by the civil courts. The final upshot was the secession, in 1843, of no fewer than 474 ministers, led by Thomas Chalmers and William Cunningham, to form a Free Church of Scotland independent of the State. The only logical conclusion of this progressive disintegration of national Churches would have been the complete separation of the Church from the State. But so far only a minority of clergy, either in England or Scotland, have been willing to face that solution, while statesmen as a rule find the Church too useful an auxiliary to take the initiative in disestablishment.

In England the conversion of Newman to Rome gave a powerful impetus to Catholic reaction. But it was doomed to remain a minority movement. An avowed attempt to lead the nation back to the Middle Ages might appeal to romantic reactionaries brought up on Sir Walter Scott's novels and unable to see any good in democracy or in the industrialism which bred democracy. It could not hope to move the solid mass

of Victorian Englishmen, confident that their country still led the world in progress and that a policy of cautious concession, here a little and there a little, was the sovereign remedy for social discontent. In 1847 Lord John Russell, as Prime Minister, deliberately affronted the Tractarians by nominating Renn Dickson Hampden, a scholar whom some years before they had denounced as a heretic, to be Bishop of Hereford. In 1850 the dependence of the Church on the State was further emphasized. Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, a High Churchman of the old school, refused to institute to the living of Brampford Speke the Rev. George Cornelius Gorham, who disbelieved in the magic efficacy of the sacrament of baptism. Gorham took the matter into court; and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the supreme court of appeal in ecclesiastical cases, decided in his favour against Phillpotts. This assertion of the jurisdiction of the State in spiritual matters led Henry Edward Manning, Archdeacon of Chichester, and some others to transfer their allegiance to Rome as the only curb on "licence of thought and will."

The Vatican now began to nurse high hopes of the reconversion of England to the faith. Even before the reception of Manning, Pius IX, whose government of his own State was an orgy of repression, cruelty, and corruption, deemed the time opportune to map out England into twelve Catholic episcopal sees and to appoint Nicholas Wiseman first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. But the nation was still Protestant enough to be roused by the mere suspicion of papal aggression. Russell, who shared the popular attitude, carried, in 1851, an Ecclesiastical Titles Act which forbade Catholic prelates to assume territorial designations in Britain. It would have been difficult, however, to enforce the Act without courting the charge of persecution; and by general consent it has been suffered to remain a dead letter.

The secularization of the State was carried a stage further when a measure was passed allowing professed Jews to sit in Parliament. Jews had now been settled in England for two hundred years and had come to play a prominent, though not disproportionate, part in her economic life. Provided that he ceased to profess Judaism, it was as easy for a Jew to enter public life as for a Christian. David Ricardo, after abandoning his religion for the Church of England, had bought a seat in the unreformed Parliament with money made on the Stock Exchange, and, being willing to take the test then in force, had been allowed to sit. Benjamin Disraeli, baptized into the Established Church at the age of twelve, had taken his seat after swearing the prescribed oath "on the true faith of a Christian," and had now for many years been leader in the House of Commons of the same Tory squires who strenuously opposed the admission of unconverted Jews to that assembly. Yet no one could attach serious importance to the profession of Christianity by Ricardo or Disraeli. The time had plainly come to ring down the curtain on the farce by which a Jew who adhered to the faith of his fathers was excluded from Parliament, while a Jew who believed in no religion was admitted under a hollow show of conformity. The Jewish Disabilities Act of 1858 left the form of oath to be administered to peers and commoners to the discretion of each House. Jews were thereby enabled to sit in the House of Commons. The House of Lords maintained the barrier against them for a few years longer. Finally a new oath was agreed to from which the profession of Christian faith was omitted, and in which the peer or commoner simply swore by Almighty God to bear true allegiance to the sovereign. The case of men to whom that oath was a meaningless form had not yet arisen and was destined to be the theme of a stormier controversy.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DECAY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

THE publication, in 1859, of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* fell like a thunderbolt on the defenders of orthodox religion. The idea of evolution was not new. Since the beginnings of scientific thought the view that the present order of nature had come into being by a gradual process of change had been a tenable alternative to the belief in special creation. But until the nineteenth century neither doctrine had been demonstrable by evidence. Darwin and Wallace showed that evolution was explicable by the operation of causes already familiar to the educated public, and thereby gave the theory a decisive advantage over the orthodox hypothesis. Thenceforth the Church's dogma of "one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible" was definitely "on the run" before the counter-hypothesis of the evolution of all things by the blind, improvident, and wasteful workings of natural selection.

Nor was natural science the only field in which traditional Christianity was on the retreat. In 1860 appeared a volume entitled *Essays and Reviews*, of the seven contributors to which six were clerics of the Church of England. The work was liberal in tendency; and in particular two of the essayists, Rowland Williams and Henry Bristowe Wilson, ventured to deny the verbal inspiration of the Bible and to throw doubt on the eternal punishment of the wicked. Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, an old-fash-

ioned High Churchman who had lately been worsted by Huxley in a verbal duel before the British Association, raised a hue and cry against the book and procured its condemnation by Convocation. Williams and Wilson were prosecuted in the ecclesiastical courts for heresy. The case was carried to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, where the Lord Chancellor, Lord Westbury, in a celebrated judgment "dismissed hell with costs and took away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of everlasting damnation."

Further scandal arose in 1862 when John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal, published the first volume of his critical examination of the Pentateuch. Colenso's doubts of the inerrancy of Scripture had been confirmed by the questions put to him by the simple Zulus to whom he ministered as a missionary; and in his published work he accepted in great measure the conclusions of German theologians as to the composite origin and unhistorical nature of the Pentateuchal narratives. The South African bishops, led by Robert Gray of Cape Town, deposed and excommunicated Colenso. The latter appealed to the Privy Council and obtained a ruling that the Anglican Church in South Africa was a voluntary religious society and that Gray consequently had no coercive jurisdiction over him. The heretical bishop remained in possession of his see; and Convocation had to be content with declaring his books erroneous and causing him to be generally inhibited from preaching in England. Colenso was distinguished, among other things, by his liberal views on the Zulu question, particularly in regard to polygamy and white encroachments on native land. The prejudice against him was therefore both political and religious.

Little by little the edifice of orthodoxy was being sapped and undermined by the discoveries of science:—

"Cosmogony.

Geology, ethnology, what not,
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith's about to die)." ¹

Against the accumulating mass of factual evidence that the historic faith was false, its defenders could pit only an interested "will to believe," fortified by appeals to

"A sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears,
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps!" ¹

Such subjective considerations might justify individual believers in any profession of faith to which they were inclined. They could hardly justify the public establishment and endowment of a Church wedded to an immutable creed and enjoying political, economic, and educational privileges denied to its critics. Least of all could they justify the establishment and endowment of a Church alien to the majority of the people of the country in which it functioned. Whatever might be said for the Established Church in England, its position in Ireland had long been indefensible. The census of 1861 showed that its professed adherents numbered less than one in eight of the population. In 1867 Gladstone became leader of the Liberal party. Though a High Churchman to the end of his life, he had moved far politically since the days when he had first written on Church and State. He now hoped, by the disestablishment and disendowment of the Protestant Church in Ireland, to do something to dam the rising tide of Fenianism and pacify the country. In 1868 he was returned to power, and in 1869 carried his bill, provision being made for the

¹ Robert Browning, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*.

existing clergy for the term of their lives. As usual, the Church treated a diminution of her endowments as a threat to religion itself,¹ the militant Bishop of Peterborough, William Connor Magee, arguing that what the Irish peasantry wanted was not the disestablishment of the Church, but the settlement of the land question.² The turn of the landlords was to come; but that did not save the Church from disestablishment. Gladstone's belief that such measures could pacify Ireland proved a delusion. Fenianism, a republican movement directed against British rule and landlordism, was as hostile to the Catholic as to the Protestant hierarchy and equally detested by both. Nevertheless the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church was a step forward and set a valuable precedent.

The growth of foreign competition with British industry and the partial enfranchisement of the working class by the Reform Act of 1867 forced the question of national education to the front. Hitherto the provision of elementary education had been left to the National Society and other religious agencies, which between them catered only for a small fraction of the child population. Since 1832 the State had subsidized and inspected the elementary schools provided by these bodies; but there its action had stopped. The result was that in 1861 a royal commission reported that less than a million children, or only one in twenty, were attending schools whose structural and educational efficiency was such as to qualify for a Government grant. It was incongruous that the provision of education in an industrial country, whose survival depended on its technical efficiency, should be left to agencies whose primary object was to pre-

¹ "The Anglican Church will more readily pardon attacks upon thirty-eight of its thirty-nine articles than upon one thirty-ninth of its income" (Karl Marx, preface to *Capital*, first edition).

² Queen Victoria's Journal, February 11, 1869.

pare children not for this world, but for the next. But every attempt at advance was blocked by the mutual rivalry of the sects. In 1869 the National Education League was formed by Joseph Chamberlain and other Birmingham manufacturers to agitate for a national system of free secular education. The denominationalists promptly founded the Education Union to oppose the League. The Elementary Education Act carried by Gladstone's Government in 1870 attempted to compromise between the parties. The secularist programme was rejected and the subsidy to denominational schools continued and increased; but where they did not cover the ground, School Boards elected by the ratepayers were empowered to provide elementary schools out of the rates. Such schools were precluded from teaching the formulæ of any particular denomination, but not from teaching doctrines assumed to be common to all Christians. The result was a dual system under which one part of the nation's children were educated by the National Society and similar bodies in the tenets of the Churches, and another part by the School Boards in "undenominational" Christianity. Such a system might be described as semi-national, but hardly as national.

The bulk of educated Englishmen in fact did lip-service to Christianity, supported the Church as an institution, and voted subsidies to religious education less from a living conviction of the truth of their religion than from a fear of the effect of irreligion on the working class. The Church had long ceased to direct opinion or even, except when her establishment or endowments were in question, to present a united front. A dwindling number of clergy stood immovably by the Protestantism of their forefathers. A larger number, following in the footsteps of the Tractarians and organized in the English Church Union, sought to magnify their office by reviving confession, eucharistic vestments, the use of incense, and

other features of medieval ritual and dogma. Others, of whom the most distinguished was Frederick Denison Maurice, essayed the ingenious, but impossible task of reconciling the Church with the modern world by jettisoning time-honoured dogmas and twisting the residue into accord with scientific discovery. Wits classified the three schools as "low and lazy, high and crazy, broad and hazy." Without the cement of establishment and endowment their continued union in a single Church would have been impossible.

In 1874 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald Campbell Tait, urged by the vehemently Protestant Queen Victoria, introduced a Public Worship Regulation Bill which empowered any parishioners, subject to veto by the bishop, to prosecute clergy introducing illegal ornaments, services, or ritual into the church, and rendered the offenders liable to deprivation and even imprisonment. Disraeli, in order to flatter Victoria and confirm her partiality for his administration, entered the fray and helped to place on the statute-book a bill for which he cannot have cared two pins. The Act had the paradoxical result of driving many strong High Churchmen, such as Henry Parry Liddon, into the Liberal party. Otherwise it was ineffectual. Many who cared little or nothing for the matters in dispute recoiled from the appearance of persecution; and after a few clerics had gone to prison, Tait himself was glad to let the law sleep. Thenceforth the Church of England was allowed to slide unhindered by the State down the inclined plane of disintegration.

Meanwhile the masses on whose account the Establishment was kept up drifted steadily away from any religious faith or observance whatever. The work of Thomas Paine and Richard Carlile was continued by George Jacob Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh. Intelligent working men and women could

not fail to notice the fact that, while the most obstinate opponents of political and social reform were the bishops, the chief promoters of Owenism, Chartism, co-operation, extension of the franchise, and other radical policies, were "blasphemers" and "infidels." In 1866 Bradlaugh, as vice-president of the National Reform League, had played a prominent part, side by side with the trade union leaders George Howell and William Randal Cremer, in the reform demonstrations which forced Disraeli to extend the suffrage to urban workers. In 1876, along with Annie Besant, Bradlaugh courted imprisonment by republishing and circulating an American pamphlet recommending family limitation. The ruling class vilified and persecuted those who dared to preach to the masses the principles on which their Christian masters habitually acted. But the more Bradlaugh was feared and hated by the pillars of society, the more he was loved and followed by the people.

In 1880 the Radicals of Northampton elected Bradlaugh to Parliament as one of their two members. The Freethought orator claimed to be allowed, instead of taking the prescribed Parliamentary oath "by Almighty God," to make an affirmation of allegiance in the form permitted to Quakers. His claim having been disallowed, he then offered to take the oath in the usual way. Lord Randolph Churchill and other young "bloods" of the Tory party seized the occasion to make political capital out of Bradlaugh's Atheism and, supported by sufficient Liberals to turn a division, refused to allow him to take the oath. A bill was then introduced to permit affirmation by those who had no religious belief. But the Conservative party threw itself into the fray. A petition was presented from London merchants and bankers praying that no alteration should be made in the law in order to enable an Atheist to sit in Parliament. The bill was thrown out; and a struggle of five years'

duration (unparalleled since the days of Wilkes) ensued between the majority of the House of Commons, who refused to allow Bradlaugh to sit, and the Northampton electors, who returned him triumphantly at repeated by-elections. "Those who opposed this change," elegantly declared Churchill, "were the respectable and religious people of the country, while its supporters were the residuum and scum of the population, who scoffed at all restraint, moral or religious."¹ The result was the semi-disfranchisement of Northampton for the duration of that Parliament. In 1886 Bradlaugh was allowed to take his seat. By the Oaths Act of 1888, passed through his instrumentality, every person objecting to take an oath, whether on the ground of religious belief or of its absence, and whether in Parliament or in any other place, was empowered to make an affirmation in lieu.

It is difficult to read any sincere religious conviction into the outcry against Bradlaugh. Churchill and his immediate associates were cynical politicians using religion as a demagogic slogan to sway the uneducated. The more intellectual Conservatives, represented by the Cecil family, were not ignorant of the results of science or of the difficulties in the way of traditional belief, but saw in religious dogma an essential guarantee of the social order on which their fortunes rested.² The opposition to Bradlaugh taking his seat was rooted in the belief that Atheism endangered property. It is significant that the barrier was withdrawn when the strong line taken by Bradlaugh against the rising Socialist movement had convinced the "respectable

¹ In the House of Commons, April 30, 1883.

² "The Radical desires equality. . . . The obvious mode of determining the end towards which a traveller is going is simply to produce the line on which he has hitherto moved; and, ascertained in this manner, the object must necessarily be the equality not only of conditions but of possessions, and the extermination of religious dogma" (Salisbury in the *Quarterly Review*, 1883).

and religious" that the great iconoclast was not as black as he was painted and was in fact as much opposed as they themselves to a levelling of fortunes.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN STATE

DURING the greater part of modern history the relations between Church and State have been those of partnership and mutual support. The State has conferred privileges on the Church and protected it, if not against all attack, at any rate against rude and public attack, while the Church for its part has supported the established institutions of the State and inculcated obedience to the Government of the day.

But in the course of the last century, and especially of the last fifty years, modern States have been so torn by internecine conflicts of class and party that it has been unsafe for any Church to identify itself wholly and irrevocably with one side. Even the Catholic Church, with all her boasted immutability and infallibility, has had to trim in order to keep her hold on the masses. This has been particularly exemplified in Great Britain and Ireland. In Ireland the Fenian and agrarian movements of the last century were at their inception obnoxious to, and denounced by, the Catholic hierarchy. But parish priests found it necessary to support the Land League if they were to retain their hold on the people. Ireland has remained Catholic only because the priesthood knew how to compromise with forces which were anything but Catholic in origin. In Great Britain the Socialist revival during the industrial depression of the eighties confronted organized religion with a formidable rival claimant to the allegiance of working men and women. Cardinal Manning was alive both to this threat and to the opportunity offered to the Catholic Church to fish in the troubled waters of social politics. He

seized it by accepting seats on royal commissions on housing and education, accompanying deputations to the Government on unemployment, entering the field as mediator in the dock strike of 1889, and influencing Leo XIII in the issue of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Profiting by the visible instability of industrial capitalism, the Catholic Church cast herself for the part of its saviour or its residuary legatee.

The Church of England, owing to her connection with the State, has not the same freedom of manœuvre. Frederick Temple, who had contributed to *Essays and Reviews* and whose elevation by Gladstone to the see of Exeter had been assailed by Pusey as "the most frightful enormity ever perpetrated by a Prime Minister," was at least no reactionary. As Bishop of London he was associated with Manning as a mediator in the dock strike; as Archbishop of Canterbury he refused to legalize the sacerdotal antics of the Anglo-Catholics. But the range of political action open to an Anglican prelate, whether his name be Frederick or William Temple, is not very wide. The Church of England has been described as "the Tory party at prayers." During most of its history that description has been accurate. As long as the Tory party is predominant or at least powerful in the State, it is a comfortable and dignified rôle to fill; but it is incompatible with that of a national Church. The traditional identification of the Church with Toryism meant that any cleric declaring himself a Liberal or a Socialist was regarded by his brethren as eccentric or worse. The growth of the Labour movement made it impossible to keep such opinions out of the Church. To-day a Socialist parson is no longer an eccentric. It is not easy, however, to straddle a class struggle; and in the upshot political differences may prove to have as disintegrating an effect as Biblical criticism on the unity and influence of the Establishment.

A noticeable feature of the last fifty years has been

the gradual extinction of the old Evangelical party. As early as 1899 Salisbury was commenting to Victoria on the decay of Sabbatarianism.

“The upper and the lower class are in the main averse to a rigid observance of the Sunday: the middle class support it. There can be no doubt that during the last half century the rigid party have become much smaller.”¹

Evangelical religion, with its insistence on the letter of the Bible and on the necessity of personal conversion, had flourished chiefly among the trading and manufacturing middle class who had come to the front in the Industrial Revolution, and who in the Victorian era had been both economically powerful and politically important. But by the end of the century this class was losing its power and its importance. The joint stock company had become the normal form of industrial enterprise, and in its turn had prepared the way for the trust and combine. These developments were driving to the wall, or out of business, the sober, puritanical middle class of former days. At the head of industry were financiers who bought titles and entered the governing class; in its ranks were a new middle class of black-coated workers and a proletariat more and more permeated by Socialism. None of these had the Victorian business man's incentives to plain living and high, if narrow, thinking. All in varying measure had come to base their daily activities on scientific postulates and to ignore a religion founded on the assumption of miracle. By 1911 the Churches were lamenting that not only “the masses of the people,” but “the educated middle class, especially the young people,” were “losing touch altogether with the House of God.”²

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, May 21, 1890.

² *Free Church Year Book*, cited by Halévy, *History of the English People in 1905-1915*, Book I, Chap. I.

It was natural in the circumstances that the Churches should fight desperately to maintain their hold on education. By keeping control of the children they might hope to retain the allegiance of at least a respectable minority of adults; but if the schools went, everything went. In particular, the Catholic and Anglican Churches were concerned to safeguard the schools under their control against the rate-supported competition of the Board Schools. An opportunity of political blackmail presented itself when it became necessary to legislate for the provision of not only elementary but also technical education. Down to the end of the nineteenth century British technical education lagged behind the needs of industry. No public authority was obliged to provide any but elementary instruction. Here and there a School Board with departmental approval ventured to provide higher-grade schools or evening classes for scientific and technical instruction; but an important section of the governing class did not believe in teaching the masses too much and viewed such "fads" with disfavour.¹ In 1900 certain expenditure incurred by the London School Board on scientific and technical teaching was disallowed by an auditor of the Local Government Board. The School Board took the matter into court. A committee of reactionaries, prominent among whom was the ardent High Churchman Lord Hugh Cecil,² was formed to fight the case against the School Board, and obtained a ruling (the famous "Cockerton judgment") by which any application of the rates to scientific or technical teaching, whether of children or adults, was declared illegal.

The matter could not rest there. British industry could not be handicapped merely to gratify the

¹ Queen Victoria consistently threw her weight against "over-education." See her Journal, July 30, 1886; March 10, 1894; and May 13, 1896.

² Later Lord Quickwood.

parsimony of ratepayers and the prejudices of the Cecils. The Government of the day, though it consisted of Lord Hugh's friends, was obliged to legislate for the public provision of the education which the nation needed. But Church support had to be bought at a price. The price exacted in the Education Act of 1902 was the abolition of the elected School Boards and the extension of rate aid to denominational schools to enable them to hold their own in competition with those publicly provided. On this condition the Catholic and Anglican Churches and their friends in Parliament were pleased to allow some provision for technical education to be made obligatory on the co-opted county and borough education committees which replaced the School Boards. Nonconformists, who had few schools of their own and were usually content with the "undenominational" teaching given in publicly provided schools, revolted against the imposition of "Rome on the rates." Their resentment contributed, with other causes, to the Liberal victory of 1906, but was impotent to force an amending bill through the House of Lords.

Thus, in a country not more than ten per cent. of whose citizens regularly attended any place of worship, the minority were nevertheless able to dictate terms to the majority and to extort support from the rates and taxes for the forms of religious teaching which this minority favoured. The reason was that while they were actively interested in this specific issue, the majority were indifferent to the whole subject. On the side of the public endowment of denominational teaching, besides the priests and parsons, were battalions of business men and property-owners who, whether they believed in the traditional creeds or not, considered their inculcation on the children of the poor an essential insurance against social unrest and were prepared to spend public money on that object. Against such endowment were the Nonconformists

(of dwindling electoral importance and too timid to carry their anti-clericalism to its logical conclusion of secularism) and the rising Labour movement. But Labour, though secularist by tradition, was uninterested in sectarian controversy and only too ready, as the event proved, to shelve the whole subject under well-directed pressure from the Catholic minority.

It may be asked why, in the face of this mass of popular indifference, the Churches did not sink their rivalries and combine on a common platform. To a certain extent there was a disposition to do so. As might be expected, this tendency was chiefly manifest in those Churches which were not sundered from other denominations by the privileges of actual or the lure of potential establishment. The affiliation of various Nonconformist bodies in England to the Free Church Council, and the union between the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church (the latter itself the product of a fusion between smaller bodies which had broken away at different times from the Established Kirk) show that, where no overwhelming vested interest stands in the way, it is possible for Christians in the twentieth century to bury their ancestral hatchets.¹ But certain chasms are too broad to bridge. The Catholic Church has never forgotten that in the Middle Ages she ruled Europe as the equal, or even superior, partner of kings, and has not abandoned the ambition of ruling the whole world on similar conditions. A Church which was once everything can make no terms with rivals which in her eyes have no title to exist. She uses them when she must: she crushes them when she can. And though the claims of a national Church are less absolute than this, no body enjoying the privileges and endowments of an established Church has ever

¹ Subsequently, in 1929, the United Free Church reunited with the Established Church of Scotland, thus terminating the disruption of 1843.

willingly accepted equality with sects owing their origin solely to private enterprise in religion.

This was illustrated by the prolonged and embittered resistance offered to the disestablishment and disendowment of the Anglican Church in Wales. That the Church in Wales had long ceased to be the Church of the people was due more to her own default than to any other cause. Until the nineteenth century the amount of Nonconformity among the Welsh had been inconsiderable. There was no grim record of spoliation and oppression, as in Ireland, to set the Welsh people against the English. The Church of England could have fared as well in Wales as in England if her bishops and clergy had taken the trouble to learn the Welsh language and attend to their duties. They did not do so. Nonconformity filled the vacuum; and disestablishment became a popular election slogan. The battle was fought out on the usual party lines, the Liberals taking the matter up on its vote-catching merits, and the Tories doing their best to represent the advocates of disestablishment as enemies of God and man. But their cry rang false. The spectacle of the future Earl of Birkenhead posing as the champion of religion against sacrilege moved even the Catholic Chesterton to a skit which ended with a contemptuous "Chuck it, Smith!" The Bill disestablishing and disendowing the Church in Wales was passed into law under the Parliament Act in 1914 and came into operation in 1919.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHURCH IN WORLD CONFLICT

FOR the last thirty or forty years the Churches have been faced with the problem of maintaining their position and influence against a rising tide of public indifference. The world has been rent by social and international conflicts to the causes of which the dogmas of traditional Christianity are irrelevant, and to avert which its accredited spokesmen are utterly impotent. A generation has grown to manhood and womanhood which, while far from devoid of public spirit, is uninterested in the theological issues that divided its grandparents. National Churches have trailed helplessly in the wake of national statecraft, and have so manifestly forfeited all claim to leadership that their pronouncements now hardly possess even news value.

The Church of England has remained the obedient auxiliary of the State. Nothing better illustrates the interaction of secular and ecclesiastical politics than the recent history of relations between the Anglican and the Orthodox Eastern Churches. Historically, the Orthodox Church is the Church of the Byzantine Empire and of those countries which, like Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia, derived their Christianity from Constantinople. From the Orthodox point of view, if strictly taken, the Catholic Church of the West is heretical and schismatic, and the Anglican Church doubly so—a heresy within a heresy, a schism within a schism. But political exigencies can override even ecclesiastical anathemas. In the early years of the twentieth century the menace of German expansion led to the Triple Entente between

Britain, France, and Russia. In 1912, in pursuance of this policy, a party of British public men, including members of Parliament, financiers, and bishops, visited Russia to meet members of the Duma and other Russian notables. The objects of the visit were primarily secular, viz. the cementing of the Entente and the promotion of the investment of British capital in Russia. It was deemed expedient, however, to solder the alliance between the States by mutual recognition and fellowship between the Churches. Hence the inclusion of bishops in the expedition.

In 1917 the Russian Church shared in the downfall of Tsarist autocracy. The effect was to promote even closer relations between the Anglican Church and the East. In British eyes the Orthodox Church was now an important barrier to the spread of revolution in eastern Europe. The Orthodox for their part, weakened by the loss of Russia, could not afford to let ecclesiastical pedantry stand between them and the proffered hand of Anglican friendship. From 1918 onward the Anglican press and pulpit became a sounding-board for allegations of persecution in Russia; and, since one good turn deserves another, the Patriarch and Holy Synod of Constantinople, in 1922, formally acknowledged the validity of the orders of the (till then) heretical and schismatical Church of England. The subsequent reconciliation of the Russian Church to the Soviet régime, since it coincided with the military alliance between the two Governments in the Second World War, did not embarrass the ecclesiastical peacemakers. It remains to be seen how long the spiritual union of hearts will survive the fall of the diplomatic "iron curtain."

There is nothing unnatural or dishonest in this identification of the Church of England with the policy of the State. The English episcopate is part and parcel of the English ruling class. Bishops are nominated by the Government of the day. Twenty-

five of their number sit in the House of Lords. Their normal social contacts are with other members of the ruling class—peers, front-bench politicians, county and industrial magnates, heads of the professions—all of whom understand perfectly the place of the Church in the machinery of government and have no inclination to disturb it. To clerics so situated it is natural to regard the interests of the Church and those of the country as identical. Only in recent years has the alienation of the Church from the mass of the people been forced on their attention at all.¹

It is otherwise with clergy whose duties bring them into contact with the world of scholarship or whose work lies among the industrial population. When even clerical scholars admit the late and composite origin of the Pentateuch, the admixture of much anonymous matter with the writings of the Hebrew prophets, the participation of Jesus in the apocalyptic delusions of his age, and the post-apostolic authorship of the Gospels and of important Epistles, we can hardly wonder that lay critics reject the authority of the Bible altogether or that popular Freethought translates professional theologians' jargon about "pseudepigrapha" by the plain English word "forgery." The laity cannot be expected to believe dogmas which are no longer believed by the more erudite of the clergy themselves. Meanwhile events in the larger world—the rise of the industrial and political Labour movement and the shattering effects of two world wars—have underlined the fact that the masses of the people are more concerned with sufficiency and security on earth than with a hypothetical heaven or hell. The result has been a sort of schizophrenia in the Church of England. Her historic traditions and her status as an established and endowed Church have pulled her to the Right; her need to recapture the allegiance of the

¹ See the report entitled *Towards the Conversion of England*, and the author's comments in *Anglican Shipwreck*.

masses has pulled her to the Left; and the practical upshot has been paralysis.

Ecclesiastical statesmanship during the last thirty years has sought to increase the Church's freedom of manœuvre while retaining the benefits of establishment. In 1919 Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, procured the passage through Parliament of the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act. This delegates legislation on matters concerning the Church of England to an assembly consisting of a House of Bishops, a House of Clergy, and a House of Laity, measures so passed having the force of an Act of Parliament when approved by resolution in the Lords and Commons. The principle of State control is thus preserved; but as the Parliamentary veto is unlikely to be exercised save in the most exceptional cases, the Church has in fact gained a large measure of self-government.

The only instance in which a measure of the Church Assembly was actually vetoed by Parliament was that of the projected revision of the Prayer Book. In 1927 the Assembly put forward for optional use a revised book designed to conciliate at one and the same time those who found the existing liturgy insufficiently medieval and those who found it insufficiently modern. But it was the medievalist features of the revision, and in particular the proposed legalization of the reservation of the sacrament, which excited attention and controversy. In two successive sessions the House of Commons refused its assent to a measure which would have legalized Catholic practices in the Established Church of a Protestant country. The rejection of the revised Prayer Book has made no practical difference. The clergy of the Church of England have long exercised their own discretion as to the degree of obedience due to liturgical rules made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is no authority either able or willing

to restrain an Anglo-Catholic or a Modernist parson from pleasing himself in such matters. Parliament can deny to Catholic practices the *cachet* of legality; but as no one wants to persecute parsons, there is no consequential penalty. Those who find it a grievance that Parliament should be in a position to vote ecclesiastical usages legal or illegal have a very simple remedy in disestablishment. So far they have shown no disposition to adopt it.

The practical impotence of a Church which tries to maintain its national character in a nation torn by conflict was signally illustrated on the occasion of the general strike of 1926. Demands for wage reductions in the coalfields had led to a national coal stoppage; and the trade unions had called a strike of other workers in support of the miners. The Baldwin Government was well prepared for this and determined to fight the strike to a finish. Archbishop Davidson, after consultation with the chief Nonconformist bodies, appealed to the Government to procure a simultaneous cessation of the miners' lock-out and the general strike. The Government refused even to allow him to broadcast his appeal. A well-meant attempt by the Industrial Christian Fellowship, a body of socialistically-inclined Churchmen and Nonconformists, to mediate in the coal dispute was rebuffed by the Government and derided by the Press. There could have been no sharper reminder to the Church of her function as the auxiliary policeman of the State. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne, by strongly supporting the Government, proved the Catholic Church to be a more reliable buttress of social conservatism than Anglicanism in its present state of disintegration can ever be.

The same causes, in fact, which operate against the survival in the modern world of the sovereign national State are making for the enfeeblement of national Churches. The development of science, industry,

and commerce has made the world economically interdependent; and it is proving increasingly difficult to reconcile national sovereignty, as it has hitherto been understood, with the world unity imposed by technical progress. The conflicts which divide mankind to-day, even when national in form, are usually economic and social in content. Every Church is called on to define its position in relation to such conflicts. The Catholic Church has least difficulty in doing so. Her organization is international and her basis authoritarian. Linked exclusively to no national State, she is the natural ally of established order against revolutionary change. So long as in any quarter of the globe the exploitation of man by man continues, her function is to keep the exploited masses ignorant, devout, and docile, and to draw her pay from the exploiters in endowment, privilege, and protection from attack. Any State which is prepared to pay for her services is sure of her support; any State which is not is sure of her anathema. A scientifically organized world would be fatal to her. Against that she fights, and she can make the fight a long one.

A national Church is in no such happy position. Her eggs are all in one basket; and that basket is liable to disconcerting changes of shape. The State with which her fortunes are linked is torn by internal struggle in which alliance with either side is fraught with peril. If she makes it her business to sanctify the established order, she runs the risk of being treated as an enemy when that order is overthrown. If she joins in challenging that order, she alienates its defenders and endangers the position of privilege which she enjoys on the implicit condition of standing or falling with them. William Temple, the brilliant son of a brilliant father, tried, during his short archiepiscopate (1942-1944), to engage the Church on the side of social change. His attempt to "bring religion into politics" was censured by most defenders of the

Established Church as bringing politics into religion. It is obviously impossible to do one without the other.

The passage of the Education Act of 1944 provided the Churches with yet one more opportunity of putting the financial screw on the State. The declared purpose of the Act was to institute free secondary education; and in so far as it did this, it was generally recognized as a measure of progress. But the support of the Churches, as usual, had to be bought at a price. The price on this occasion was the payment by the State of half the cost of maintaining denominational schools at the standard of efficiency of publicly provided schools, and the imposition on the latter of an obligation to give religious instruction according to a syllabus agreed between local authorities and the Churches. Thus, at the very time when Church leaders admit the alienation of the people from religion, they have succeeded by political pressure in extorting more public money than before for the inculcation of a religion in which the people no longer believe. The Catholic hierarchy even make it a grievance that they themselves should have to find half the cost of maintenance of Catholic schools.

Twice I have quoted, in order to refute it, Chesterton's specious and fallacious summary of English history in *The Secret People*. I make no apology for quoting it again.

"We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.
It may be we shall rise the last as Frenchmen rose the first,
Our wrath come after Russia's wrath and our wrath be the
worst . . .
But we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet.
Smile at us, pay us, pass us. But do not quite forget."

This poem was written many years before 1917. Had it been written later, so good a Catholic as Chesterton would assuredly have avoided the suggestion that godless Russia might provide a precedent for any possible

uprising of the people of England. As a matter of fact it is entirely false to say that the people of England have not spoken yet. They spoke, and rose too, for that matter, before Frenchmen did. They rose with de Montfort in the dawn of English nationhood, with Tyler and Ball, with Oldcastle and Ket. They manned Cromwell's army and followed him until he tricked and betrayed them. They listened to Paine and Cobbett, formed Corresponding Societies and Political Unions, and built up the Chartist, Trade Union, and Co-operative movements at a time when bishops found nothing better to do than to vote for hanging boys for shoplifting or to prosecute divines who dared to deny eternal punishment.

All these uprisings of the English people have had to meet the enmity of the highest dignitaries of the Church. Papal bulls and excommunications, stake and gallows, pillory and prison, have one after another been the weapon of repression. Rome we know of old. She would use these means again tomorrow if she could. She uses them to-day as far as she dare. In an age of world unification Rome, not a provincial thing like Canterbury, is the real centre of religious reaction.

The Church of England is of softer stuff. She has grown decrepit and hesitant. Seeing the masses pass by her without heeding, she gropes towards the Left. Recollecting her establishment and her endowments, she recoils towards the Right. She no longer leads; she follows. So long as she follows in the wake of democracy nobody will mark her, and she will be tolerated. But on the day when she allies herself with Rome against progress, her past will be remembered against her and, like a millstone round her neck, will sink her for ever.

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